**University of Alberta**

*The Emperor's Club and the Pedagogical Identity Politic*

by

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## Dedication

With love to Mario, Mark, John and Cathy, Greg, Kell's Bell's, Pat, Jo, Rudy and Haley, Barb, Marc and Scott, Riz, Mike, Tap, Chris, Jen, Wayne and Karen, Kevin and Krista, Rayanne, all the Hillbillies, Milt, Gail, Geoff, Kathleen, Maryanne, Nancy, Jennifer, Chris, Judianne, Veda, Jane, Murray, Dave, and Maggie and Cam. Without all the love, and all the laughs, what's the point? Thanks especially to jan and Mario for their assistance and encouragement.

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**This Thesis Needs No Introduction**

> "You're either a librarian or a teacher."
> "A teacher."
> "I could tell; you got that look teachers always have, like they lost something."
>
> ~ from Hitchcock's *Spellbound*

This teacher wants to lose the format of the standard thesis introduction.

A certain amount of disingenuousness accompanies even the most candid of critical introductions, for often they are written after the large part of a critical labour has taken shape. That which came first, in the thinking through of things, ends up last, the last first. The intention, unconscious or otherwise, is usually to initiate a rhetorical chain of analytical events, to begin a linear line of cause and effect, along which insights appear to come after--and to naturally arise out of--earlier ones, when in fact the opposite may have been the case in the course of the research and writing.

The process is the critical reverse of what goes on with films and their endings. Slavoj Žižek, in a discussion of how cinematic climaxes and dénouement could have been written with any number of different endings but still engender the same sense naturalness and inevitability, writes that,

> [w]e experience the present ending... as something that "naturally" and "organically" follows from the preceding action, but if we were to imagine another ending--say, for example, that Bergman's heroic husband were to die and that Bogart were to take his place on the plane for Lisbon together with Bergman--it, too, would be experienced by viewers as something that developed "naturally" out of earlier events. How is this possible, given that the earlier events are the same in both cases? The only answer is, of course, that the experience of a linear "organic" flow of events is an illusion (albeit a necessary one) that masks the fact that it is the ending that *retroactively* confers the consistency of an organic whole on the preceding events. What is masked is the radical contingency of the enchainment of narration.... (1992, p. 69)

The linking of ideas in criticism is contingent on purpose and on the ideological make-up of the critic. Persuasion hinges on how clearly one can argue a chain of cause and effect, but in a writing such as this--one that considers relations between film, ideology, and individual identities, relations that are rarely straightforward as regards cause and effect--it is necessary to acknowledge the possibility of rhetorical illusions. I would not want the logical and rhetorical machinery of my analysis to contradict the processes under study.

But while I avoid overly contrived cause and effect analyses, I do not mean to suggest that, in the shaping of teacher identities, events do not unfold one after the other in what appears to be linear time. After all, modern education is predicated on the notion that when individuals enter the world, a subsequent process of education and socialization next ensues. As well, in education studies, theory generally precedes practice But in a poststructural age, causes are seldom self-evident and never act alone. Causes are now conceived of as at least multiple, their relations to effects contingent on their relation to complex, interlocking, and overlapping systems. Critical judgment itself is considered relative; the viewed changes with the viewer.

So, as a way of introducing my analysis, I will offer a narrative of how I arrived at my subject matter, and then I will lay out what terms and critics became key to my interpretive approach. As regards my central thesis, I will refer my readers to the analysis itself, rather than artificially predispose them to my conclusions here.

I am a teacher. This is an undeniable part of my identity in this culture, and affects most aspects of my life. My research, too, is influenced by my choice to identify with this vocation. I carry with me many personal narratives that circumscribe major aspects of my professional identity, and I see social phenomena related to teaching and teachers through the lens of my own struggle to find dignity and pride in my profession. The colleague 'other', the student 'other', and my self as pedagogue are all influential characters in the identity drama of this particular teaching self. But the voices and influences of many teacher-characters I have watched on the big screen influence me as well, phantoms from the realm of representation. These carry a power different from 'real' social agents; they possess a legitimacy born of the belief that (a) art can capture universal human truths, (b) that such art is a passive reflector of what is, and that (c) widely reproduced narratives must be credible because they have found widespread distribution. It is the relationship between cinematic representations of identity formations and ones born of movie watching that I wish to interrogate.

Prior to beginning a Bachelor of Education, I completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, a program involving study of works by artists such as René Magritte and Edward Keinholz, works obsessed by the dance of viewer and viewed. Engagement with the notion of viewer subjectivity and questions of representation soon made impossible any further belief that a *simple* transference of a social meaning, coded in aesthetics, could

take place between artist and gallery viewer via the canvas. The complexity of interactions and reciprocities that take place between social agents through various media became something I could not ignore, and I was now and then puzzled by conversations with fellow education students when they would passively accept the representations of dominant culture, particularly the received wisdom about, and imagined roles of teachers--as if a movie carried a singular meaning that all viewers magically gleaned in perfect correspondence to each other. It is no surprise then that in my course work for both a B.Ed., and the M.Ed that followed, I was influenced by education scholars who compare "critical reflection with benign or generic conceptions of reflection" (Trier, 2001, p. 127), and who believe that critically reflective practices should not engage with technical aspects of teaching only but also be focused "outwardly at the social conditions in which [individual and collective teaching] practices are situated (Zeichner in Trier, 2001, p. 127), *including* the conditions of cultural representations.

The research focus which guides my work began with my own observations that the manner in which teachers are perceived by all stakeholders (school faculty, parents, students and the community at large) is influenced by how those stakeholders make meaning in part out of fictitious representations of teachers in film, fiction and television. One would guess it obvious to most that Hollywood's celluloid images cannot capture our school communities' complex and challenging everyday realities. But many conversations I have had with fellow teachers indicated a sense of fictitious teacher characters as *peers* against whom colleagues compared their own practice, without examination of the representational accuracy of these films. This struck me as an extraordinary amount of power to grant a Hollywood fiction.

I had seen movies such as *Dead Poet's Society* years earlier, and had found the idealistic, often saccharine representations of the self-sacrificing teacher predictable, and likely, I suspected, self-serving (in terms of studio profit), as well as "other-serving", in terms of conforming to the dominant culture's version of the ideal teacher. But in later and more critical viewings of teacher films, I was not so much casually dubious as frightened; I was in a demanding profession and part of an embattled teachers' association in Klein Alberta, and the government, as well as so much of the culture at large, expected teachers to compromise their financial wellbeing, sane work environments, and physical/emotional health as a matter of course in order to live up to a view of teaching that just so happened to suit very nicely the objectives of a government that preferred to see teaching as a Christian vocation involving charity and self-sacrifice on teachers' parts rather than as a stable, professional culture requiring adequate public funding. The figure of the self-sacrificing teacher in film began to abrade. This research then is my own investigation of the influence of a popular medium and the potential for film to create, perpetrate and transform in powerful ways representations that become our 'reality blinders', those frames that configure the ways in which we see our world. I employ a working model of identity that questions the conventional belief that self-identity is present to the conscious mind--an accessible constituent of self-knowledge. Rather, my approach assumes identity to be in a constant state of transformation, referring instead to the quest for a state of wholeness and selfhood that is ultimately unattainable. My scope correlates even more closely to the relationship between teachers and their filmic echoes when considering group identity--the sense of identity offered by one's membership in an aggregation, or profession.

Three guiding and overlapping questions came to serve as a starting point to my research, as a way of finding a way (as Heidegger said, 'questioning builds a way'):

(How) Does the representation of teachers in film affect/alter professional/group identity formation in teacher-viewers?

(How) Does the representation of teachers in film normalize specific ideologies and affect their reproduction in classrooms?

(How) Does the representation of teachers in film influence not only teachers' self-identity, but also their actions in classrooms?

During this time, I entered into a period during which the processes of identity formation appeared to me as so nebulous, complex, provisional, and uncertain (in part because of the dense and at times opaque nature of writings on the topic) that the very fact of the process alone seemed difficult to remark on, not to mention the dynamics of that process in relation to a medium as multifaceted as film. I discovered that writing could only begin once I had decided on exactly what terms I would use to express my sense of uneasiness about a film like *The Emperor's Club* and on what I would want the terms to denote and connote (for example, 'teacher', 'self', 'cinema', 'identity', 'desire'). As well, I had to decide how film and identity formation could be described, prior to attempting meaningful comment on Michael Hoffman 's 2002 film about a teacher who aspires, errs, recovers--but as most critics miss, errs again, and is by the close of the film poised to err perpetually while ostensibly functioning as an ideal teacher.

It is important to note here that while teachers and classrooms represented in film may serve both the entertainment industry and those with an interest in maintaining the dominance of ideologies represented, there is no such mandate in Hollywood to serve the

interests of teachers. The broader purpose of this research, then, is to encourage/empower practitioners to understand how mass media representations, and public readings of such, establish the ideological temper around policy debates dealing with schools and about what is deemed appropriate behavior for members of our profession. It is possible to theorize how these depictions encourage acceptance of certain political positions and not others, persuading viewers to perceive specific ideologies as 'the way things are'. I am also enthusiastic about the benefits to teachers derived from understanding an approach to film viewing that combines academic and teacherly/professional reading with popular reading of narratives as a means to discover truths about the teacher self, and ways which that self specifically relates to the broader social milieu.

**The Teaching-Self**

I am dedicated to you in my prime.

~Jane Brodie

Any discussion of professionally delineated selfhood involves espying, thinking on, selecting from, and most likely opening a diverse array of cans, each containing many theoretical worms that are more eager to resume burrowing in the ground of their assumptions than be co-opted into a given critic's efforts to fish for answers to questions about teachers and/in film.

The matter is made more complex in that the opening of one can necessitates the opening of others; it is as if one were a student of a new language, discovering that looking up words in a dictionary usually leads you to numerous other words that also require conceptual clarification before one can begin to speak confidently about the world to which words presumably refer.

For inquiry to proceed apace in this writing, a certain level of circumscription, as regards terminology, is required. In current academic discourse, mention of self calls for mention of other, and clarification of how one intends this opposition to function inside the folds of one's critique is required. In *The Second Sex* (1949), De Beauvoir sees the self/other opposition as innately human in that a conscious mind bears easy hostility to other conscious minds. Patriarchal culture, she argued, is structured around the male/self/subject that is set opposite and atop the female/other/object inside imbalanced power relations. To be sure, much work could be, and is done in the connections between teacher identity, film, and gender relations, but to speak of self and other in a

feminist context is to speak of subject and object, a dualism with a vast and complex genealogy in phenomenology, a full engagement of which is not part of my investigation.

If one backs away from a focus on self/other and gender, retreating again to the self/other distinction alone, one finds alternately Lacan's psychoanalytic engagement with this binary opposition. In Lacanian theory, the self is limned as fragmented, incapable of full self-occupation, and the other is figured as a conglomeration of forces that gives the self shape while simultaneously leaving it prey to desire. A subject/object dualism is nonetheless here also in that the partially fragmented self aspires to some level of agency--as an acting subject--that seeks dominion over the objects/others that flake and form the self. But in order to seek dominion (that is, to enact oppression or to guide benevolently, as in teaching), this self *must be sure of itself*--it must believe in its own unity. This perception in the Lacanian model is actually a misperception, or more accurately a misunderstanding (*méconnaisance*). In the register of what Lacan calls the 'imaginary,' ego formation follows from what he calls the 'mirror stage', a moment in infancy when the subject beholds itself in a mirror and comes to feel that its physical unity has been confirmed by this visual encounter. It believes itself a unified whole that looks like other whole beings around it, such as a mother or father. This is a misunderstanding because the image in the mirror is just that, an image, an illusion of bounded selfdom. But there is also in this formative encounter a second confusion wherein the infant mistakenly identifies the mirror-bound other as an object of desire--the moment is essentially narcissistic, and since this object is unattainable, *the psyche desires an image of the self as whole.*

One can immediately see that the Lacanian model bears exciting implications for any critical examination of cinematic pedagogues--teacher exemplars who function in the heroic and decidedly purposive mode--for it is important to note that fans of movies such as *The Emperor's Club* see the hero, however troubled or beleaguered the protagonist may be, much as they see their own teaching selves, as "coherent, bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of [their] own actions" (Rose in Zembylas, 2002, p. 3). There is a second-order *méconnaisance* that can be said to take place in the mind of adult filmgoers, a kind of confirmation of the narcissistic moment in childhood when a whole self is viewed within a frame that bestows an illusion of unity. A usually flattering image of the teacher is offered us by Hollywood (a passionate Robin Williams, a handsome, earnest Kevin Klein, a ravishing Maggie Smith, or a sultry Michelle Pfeiffer), and that image is narratively driven home by a heroic mode that suggests a unity of mind that such dynamic and striving individual can't seemingly help but possess. The result is that the teacher-viewer is confirmed in her belief that such unity is possible *and* that she, in identifying with the film, possesses such wholeness herself *and* that the film finally declares to the cultural field at large that the teaching profession is noble. It is no wonder then that popular reception of movies such as *Dead Poet's Society* or *Dangerous Minds* does not often recognize the inherent contradictions in such films, the anti-teacher sentiments, the fascist inclinations of Jean Brodie or the unbridled self-importance of Hundert in *The Emperor's Club.* Complex and nuanced consideration of these film texts is at odds with the simplicity and purity of the heroic mode presented therein. The filmic illusion itself becomes an object of desire, the final obtainment of which is impossible and that creates a sense of lack that the commercial

cinema capitalizes on by implying that through consumption of film such desire can be fulfilled.

Viewing the self as a subjective entity that is polysemic, every bit as multiple as the factors which shape it, enables us to speak provisionally of a professional identity that is able to initiate effects on the world, without recourse to vulgar cause and effect equations--we do, after all, manage to teach, however provisional or unstable our sense of ourselves may be. Therefore, this study bases its analysis of the teacher-self (in actual or filmically construed schools) on the Lacanian notion of the self as a mental formation characterized by unconscious and conscious levels of desire, desire that is internally engineered by structures in the unconscious and externally formed by "social conventions, community scrutiny, legal norms, [and] familial obligations" (Margolis in Zembylas, 2003, p. 108), but which also, in North American visual/consumer culture, seeks satiation in the dark of the movie theatre or on the radiated sofa that rests before the home entertainment system (teacher movies arrive at both sites). It is not by accident that Žižek has had such success in explaining Lacan through film; lush video and audio film text, commercially crafted and widely disseminated, is particularly adept at arresting attentions, playing to existing needs, and planting new or even false needs/desires.

**The Cinema**

> The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.
> ~ Walter Benjamin

With that construal of the teacher-self in place, a relatively stable conception of the cinema must also be posited prior to discussion of identity formations brought about by this or that film text.

In defining film, it is difficult to separate the viewed from the viewer, for where precisely does film exist if not in its reception (an ontological question that is answered but soon asked again by university administrators and academics who see their film departments migrate to and from English, Comparative Literature, Fine Arts and Communications departments)? Is film merely the hard copy in celluloid or digital form? Is it a creature of light between projector and screen? Is it the fleeting movement of image on screen? Or is it only and finally film once it is retinally scanned, cognitively processed, and ideologically filtered?

Film viewing is a deeply private moment, even when fellow viewers provide some amount of interruption or mediation. For any kind of signs or social text (filmically conveyed or otherwise) to enter (un)consciousness, the mind and body must be so inclined; focused attention involves a shutting out. And because commercial cinema counts on the sequestration of the consumer into a focused viewing moment, both mentalist *and* physical contexts are germane: first, because "[t]he human mind is visible in the objects we invest it in" and "[c]ompelling fictions become indices of real behaviour", behaviour born of mentalist responses to screen experience; and second, because "the amputated sensorium we know as the human body....with its responses,

emotional spasms and varying states of vibrational intensity" (Pepperell and Punt, 2003, 30, 49) is a factor, and is a site at which we can say culture resides in both its mentalist/ideological *and* its physical/materialist senses.

The physicality of the viewing instant is also important in three other ways. First, our mental perceptions of our bodies are key to early mental formations; physical form is "the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power" (Lacan, 1994. p. 94). Second, the teaching 'I' imagines the futurity of its teaching self in bodily terms; one imagines one's performative self as a body that moves through the performance space of the classroom, in proximity to student bodies. Our very language proves we speculate futurity in visual terms: we wonder if we can *see ourselves* as this or that type of teacher; we consciously dress or do not dress *like a teacher*. The culture at large has always been deeply involved in dictating bodily interactions between teachers and students (once permitting corporal punishment and touches of encouragement, now more concerned with the absolute proscription against bodily contact of any sort). Third, the relative comfort provided for the body of the viewing subject by theatre seat or domestic sofa very much facilitates passive viewing which in turn makes for easy incorporation of the viewing subject into the ideological fabric of the proffered visual text. The "boob tube", as television was early called, was characterized as such because viewers regularly adopted a semi-recumbent posture, ate and drank, rested in near darkness, and were distracted by visual stimuli--a process very much akin to how a baby is nursed and lulled to sleep at the breast. To speak meaningfully of the cinematic formation of the teaching identities of viewers, it is necessary to keep in mind this site of identity formation; for this site is a solitary one in

an important psychological sense, one that finds its performative and eremitic counterpart in the classroom-bound teaching moment wherein one is alone as teacher. Usually we face a non-professional group made up of younger people who identify as students; the state speaks in the muscles of our tongue as curriculum gets taught; and colleagues are mostly physically absent, performing their own solitary functions in other classrooms.

Alone in the classroom, we perform our identities; mentally alone in our absorption of screen contents, aspects of our identity roil, reform, recombine.

This brings us to the time honoured (and time worn) question of film and ideology. Film can function ideologically in all senses of the word: it can distort social reality to resolve problems only symbolically; it is part of whatever ideologies govern a given culture; it may privilege a specific ideology, such as a bourgeois or a collectivist one; and it may help define possibilities for the social existence of individuals. Althusser's well-known formulation of ideology--that it "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1971. p. 162)--bears obvious and fruitful implications for study of film narratives; but as famous as this Althusserian postulate is, there is the equally well-known refutation that Althusser's followers overstate the power of ideology and fail at once to properly account for the complexity of diverse viewer interactions with a film text and to explain how they themselves escape ideological nets to the point that they can muster an independent critique of those nets. Stuart Hall and the British Cultural Studies movement theorize audience in more complex terms, emphasizing processes of filmic encoding and viewer decoding, as well as Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The manufacturing (by a dominant

class) of consent (on the part of a subordinate class) involves the normalization of attitudes and practices that ensure the status quo power structures. We may also say that

> Hegemony is best understood as *the organization of consent*--the process through which subordinated forms of consciousness are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion....Gramsci emphasized the 'lower'--less systematic--levels of consciousness and apprehension of the world, and in particular he was interested in the ways in which 'popular' knowledge and culture developed in such a way as to secure the participation of the masses in the project of the ruling bloc. (Barrett, 1994, p. 238)

There is no more powerful a way to render such structures "natural" and their practices "common sense" than to make them *visually apparent* upon the cultural field; the very word 'idea' comes from the Greek word *edios* meaning "to see", and the cultural centrality of optic vision in the West ensures in part that film, a primarily visual medium, will remain a prime ideological arbiter. Thus, investigation of teachers in film becomes a small part of a larger effort to understand how certain ideas can gain widespread acceptance, even at the expense of the disenfranchised, and

> to forge a conscious recognition of the constructive relation between our visual practices and our visual culture. Such a recognition flies in the 'gazing' face of modernity's inert mythologies of 'objectivity', 'pure vision', 'bias-freedom' and the 'naked eye'. And it inverts their mythic claims to provide the yardstick against which all ideology is assessed by 'seeing' such claims as themselves 'ideological'. (Jenks, 1995, 11-12)

One can easily confirm the need for such conscious recognition as Jenks speaks of by observing the easy correlation between, on the one hand, the preponderance of filmic and televisual teacher narratives that present the teacher as self-sacrificial Christ figure bent on saving the children, and, on the other hand, widespread (though certainly not total) parental objection to teacher demands for adequate salary and other benefits--the expectation is for their own child's teachers to take professional pains since movie

teachers so readily accept suffering. This motif of martyrdom in representations of teachers in film suggests manifold unconscious desires on the part of both screen characters and those viewers who identify with them. The will to self-sacrifice, to emulate the Christ, may well reside in the unconscious minds of a deeply Judeo-Christian North American society.

Many people feel that a teacher like Mr. Holland offers a model for how 'real' teachers should behave professionally. Or, if viewers do recall that he is only a character, teachers should nonetheless 'really' be like him whenever possible. We must consider here the socially widespread view that representations can achieve a straightforward, easy correspondence with a stable reality that we can all gain access to. When thinking through this question, I think of two images that I carry in my memory: one is a beautiful sunrise that I watched in Side, Turkey and the other is a painting of a sunrise by Turner that I'd seen at the Tate Gallery in London years earlier. On the lookout point in Side, every evening in spring, there occurs the most beautiful sunset in the world. There are some ancient Roman columns, and beyond them, the Mediterranean Sea. Beyond that the sun sets night after night in the most magnificent orange, pink and magenta hues. It can take your breath away. In the square, if you turn around away from the sunset, there is a man selling paintings of the sunset. They are exactly, astonishingly, remarkably perfect replicas of the real thing. Every colour is exactly as it appears in the sky. They are red and orange and magenta--and perfectly ghastly. They belong in a cheap motel frequented by hookers and junkies. The sunsets painted by Turner are blue and green and brown and blurry and pasty and nothing like a photograph of the real thing. They knock you to your knees. They are among the most beautiful paintings I have ever seen, and they evoke all

the wonder and awe of an actual sunset--not by laying claim to reproducing a sunset but by *expressing a single, subjective impression* of a sunset, and thereby powerfully validating individual and varying impressions of the material world. Turner was an Impressionist, not a Realist. He well knew the tricks light could play and the different ways that different people experienced light. A final, stable referent in the real was not his concern--he was interested in the contingencies of perception, of viewer variability. A Realist piece, by comparison, contains an ostensibly unified vision in its arrangement of formal elements and this creates the illusion that the reality the piece purports to reflect is also stable. This is the process by which filmic, and if we admit Fiske, televisual texts construct forms of consciousness. As Fiske writes,

> unity in the [television] program...works to construct an equivalent unity in the viewing subject. As the presenters embody the unity of the program, so we, in identifying with them, are interpolated as unified subjects repressing any discomforting contradictions...that we make of the program and of ourselves. (1997, p. 55)

Observe how the following commentator represses ambivalent feelings about *The Emperor's Club* by recalling her profession:

> I saw *The Emperor's Club* this weekend. It was tremendous. I identified with the teacher in the movie as he struggled and wrestled with himself over his teaching abilities. Frankly, I'm not sure that I would have loved this movie if I weren't a teacher, but I am, so I did. (Megan in *Quiet Here* 2004)

Extraordinarily, this speaker ignores perceived failings of the representation--incongruities between Hundert's and her own struggles--by subsuming them in the name of the profession which (it ends up being believed) does not question the heroic mode of Hollywood teacher films or its themes of teacherly pre-eminence and sacrifice. The film

is seen here to police dissent from this view, the viewer to internalize the ideology, and the dominant discourse about teachers to help install the 'reality' it pretends to reflect.

Anyone who teaches adolescents has an idea of what Fiske means when he talks about TV producing reality, rather than reflecting it. Young people in the schools in which I've taught aspire to *individuality* most often as a means of gaining acceptance *in the group*. Gap ads provide an example of Fiske's notion of metadiscourse, which is the dominant realism pervading a given message. In these dance productions, diversity is celebrated, a celebration quite contrary to the slogan, "Everybody in Cords" or, "Everybody in Vests". But the disturbing subtext comes at the end of these choreographed messages, when "everybody" merges, thanks to incredible computer special effects, into one individual, the readily recognizable other who embodies even your self. The ad plays on the disparity between Lacan's notion of the ideal ego (a perfection embodied in the mirror-bound other that is unattainable and that finds new life in the visual text of the advertisement) and the ego ideal, which Lacan sees as that point when one views oneself from the perspective of the ideal, only to find (not surprisingly) a depressing dissimilarity.

Typically, Hollywood cinema makes prime use of the classical paradigm wherein protagonist meets antagonist, subsequent chains of cause-and-effect offer up action, a dramatic climax is reached, and resolution (comic or tragic) takes place. The paradigm is so widespread, so much a part of audience viewing expectations, that deviations from the paradigm rarely or barely achieve a commercial life. Hand in hand with this formula is the realistic narrative, a highly contrived and manipulated affair that succeeds so tremendously at its aesthetic deception that realist film and "real life" are considered

identical in most viewers' minds. The omnipresence of Hollywood films that embrace both the classical paradigm and the realist style (*The Emperor's Club* falls solidly under both headings) have insured that popular interpretive communities most often construe the world in the same manner a film does. Two distinct entities--the representation and the represented--mutually confirm one another's legitimacy and ensure the hegemonic, legitimating, and commercial success of those who produce and circulate such films. Awards may also accrue to viewers who interpret the film "properly", for they learn how to function within a predetermined social script, the proclaimed adherence to, and conscious awareness of which contribute in small measure to an individual's cultural capital. I am here reminded of my loss of cultural capital with my in-laws who once gleefully proclaimed at dinner that I must love movies like *Mr. Holland's Opus* and *Dead Poet's Society*--my diplomatic dissent provoked the remark that it seemed only natural that I, a teacher, would have loved them.

**The Teaching-Self ← → The Cinema**

> *Metropolis* was Hitler's favorite film--for all the wrong reasons, of course.
>
> ~David A. Cook

I have encountered a number of teachers, parents and politicians who comfortably voice the standard soundbites relating to education, pre-prescribed lines they've heard in films. I am strongly struck by the idea that spectators and film texts are in a constant state of interaction; teachers and students alike may unconsciously assent to the versions of themselves they see on the screen and then play out various tensions and expectations in classrooms. (I do not exempt myself from this process or suggest in some way that I am outside ideology; in a sense, I have integrated my sense of the maverick quality of some Hollywood teachers into my own iconoclastic take on the films which, while common in academic readings of filmic text, is a surprise to many teacher viewers with whom I've shared discussions of these films.) That filmic depictions of teachers encourage the normalization of specific ideologies and thus help marshal not only consent but also help to shape and perpetrate further enactment of such models motivates my search for greater understanding of this dynamic point between truth and fiction.

Aspects of classroom not depicted in teacher films may be as influential in the procurement of favourable viewers' impressions of teaching as those conditions which are left out/denied/made invisible/left unrecorded within the frame. Class sizes in film are generally manageable (at least after the intervention of the maverick teacher). Very little actual classroom instruction is depicted; film cannot adequately capture the labours of bookish or close conversational engagement, and paradoxically uses a montage to

*accelerate* narrative time through the long periods of study ostensibly depicted. Paper grading, planning, meetings, and the extra duties that comprise a large portion of the typical teacher's workload are rarely portrayed - reinforcing the perception that teaching is a relatively easy profession. Even when management issues make the filmic teacher's job appear difficult (*To Sir with Love*, *Dangerous Minds*) it is usually an act of making personal connections outside the classroom that resolves the scene. (One wonders if a sea change in public attitudes towards teaching might not be instigated with widespread viewing of a film, modeled on Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967) that depicted only hours of marking taking place, in quiet, away from all others in the screen teacher's life.) Representations of teachers and schools are modeled not after the idiosyncratic and diverse behaviors and appearances of working teachers but on socially widespread notions of teacherly expression of identity. This would explain the preponderance of props and types in films in general that surround professional figures. Even a director as accomplished as Stanley Kubrick once visually signaled the arrival of a professor in a scene (*Eyes Wide Shut*, 1999) by having the character appear to viewers for the first time in a tweed jacket and horn-rimmed glasses, an old cliché.

One wonders why teachers do not more regularly express frustration produced by onscreen representations of the classroom space which is, by its very nature, akin to the cinematic theatre space, another nexus of performance, authority and power. Teachers are rival re-presenters of the world who might more vigorously take issue with issues of screen error (the hesitance to do so is likely due to film's relation to desire, discussed in a section below).

I have parenthetically acknowledged above, but wish to emphasize again, that there are myriad dangers for the commentator who presumes to diagnose the ideological ills of a given film's text and reception: the meanings of a given film's narrative arc, *mise-en-scène*, editing styles, and shots and angles are open-ended and ambiguous, and any critical examination of these cannot take place outside of the critic's own idiosyncratic meaning-making practices; the term "audience" is singular but refers to a vast multiplicity of provisional and ever reconfiguring selfdoms, the dynamic mental processes of which are difficult to confirm; and there is the danger that critics, sometimes frustrated by the indeterminacy of social knowledge or the more unsettling aspects of social adversity for certain groups, are tempted to adopt a strategy of containment that is blind to the broader social contexts for one's argument as well as to its full implications.

Nonetheless, to forgo critique because of its inherent dangers and limitations is an abdication of the responsibility that accompanies awareness of the lived experience of teachers, specifically those moments wherein teaching strategies yield effects. Complex critique cannot negate its own social effectiveness, cannot (in the face of so many theoretical complexities) cede the field to commercial imperatives for fear of proceeding confidently. Teachers can affect change, can turn at least the smaller tides of events one way or another. Advertising certainly does as much (the very word comes from the Greek word meaning 'to turn'), so cautious critique should finally facilitate rather than hamper judgment.

J. A. Miller's notion of the *suture* (1977/78) is a highly useful one, both in the context of psychoanalytic thought and related film studies. If using the personal pronoun "I" signals my entry into communal norms of signification, then surely proclaiming "I,

teacher" does much the same, and we are thus responsible for assessing what the communal meanings are that cluster around "teacher". Since film is a textual object we mentally invest in (as explained above), then the way becomes clear to remark directly on a given film's contents. During the course of film viewing, a person's identity or subjectivity is in some way attached or sutured to the film's text. That identity may function henceforth in opposition to the film's codes or in concert with them, but an attachment is nonetheless created, one that factors into the patchwork formation of identity, either affirming what the literary critic Norman Holland (1975) has termed an identity theme (a single element on which variations on an identity are strung) or working against it. Either way, we may say an encounter with a film is at least potentially a formative one.

In classical Hollywood cinema, the suture is such that we readily identify with the protagonist; visual elements, primarily camera position, powerfully manipulate us into doing so, the prime example of which comes to us perhaps in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)--a viewer should rejoice during the scene wherein Norman attempts to sink a car in a swamp, a car containing the body of a woman he has murdered, only to see the vehicle become stuck, its back end visible to any policeman who might happen by, but instead, when it finally sinks, we feel relief, identifying bizarrely with a serial killer. The other way in which suture is understood in psychoanalysis and film studies is in the sense that film plays upon our desire to see and to know fully what always lies tantalizingly outside the frame. Horror films capitalize brilliantly on this desire most powerfully in scenes where a lone individual that we suspect is in peril is framed so closely within a shot that

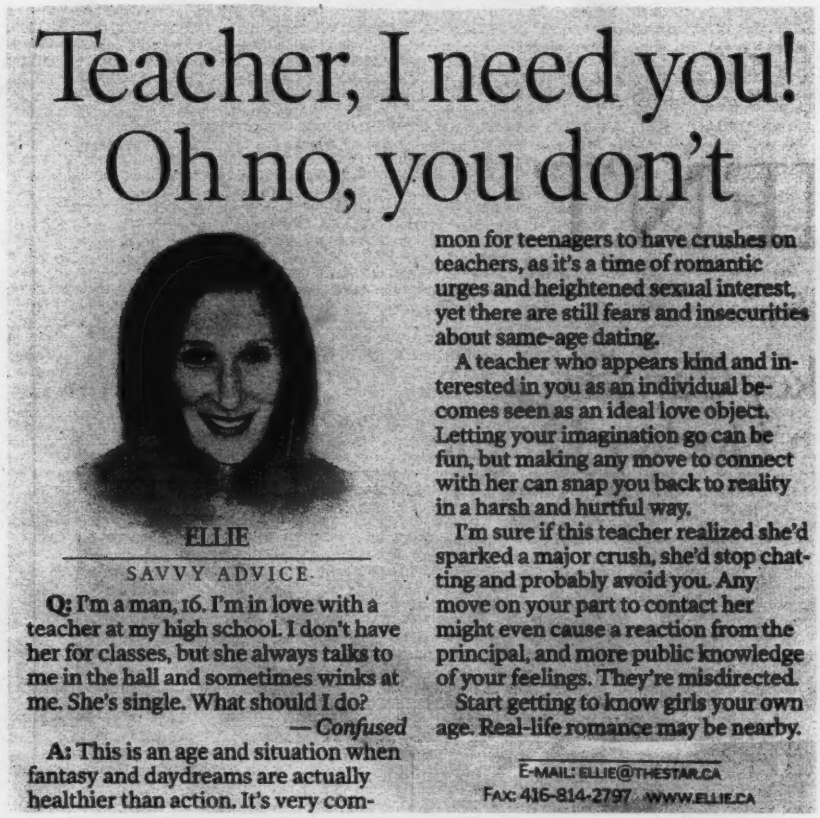
viewers are denied the opportunity to anxiously survey the individual's surroundings to scan for danger.

But why do we situate ourselves before screens at all, before representations of any kind? Why is the general sense of our lives--as gained through our senses, through conversation, through what we generally think of as non-fiction, like the network news or the newspaper--not enough? Simply put, we want more--in the Lacanian view of things, this desire is open-ended, based on a yearning for infant feelings of unity and harmony. We are aware of this lack and need to see the drama of loss and the search for satiation imaginatively recast, perhaps even find clues as to how to live, to satisfy. Seeing that a teacher can prevail can bring professional solace; seeing that no students are beyond help if good people work well and hard confirms the rightness of the educational system; seeing interpersonal dynamics between teacher and student play out on screen facilitates exorcism or catharsis for us as we think back to our own school tribulations, our working through of the psychosexual dynamics of power in the classroom. The question of desire that the process of suturing raises is complex in the case of teacher identity, for there are many *external* factors affecting teachers--social, communal, legal, professional, religious, familial, and economic ones--that the complex and *internal* psychoanalytical machinery of desire must contend with. While these factors are of course important, and are taken up incidentally in this writing, it is desire and its connection to representation that is of primary concern here, for it is that fusion from which we may best speculate on resultant identity formations.

**Desire, Representation**

I'm not bad; I'm just drawn that way.

~Jessica Rabbit



# Teacher, I need you! Oh no, you don't



ELLIE

SAVVY ADVICE

**Q:** I'm a man, 16. I'm in love with a teacher at my high school. I don't have her for classes, but she always talks to me in the hall and sometimes winks at me. She's single. What should I do?

— *Confused*

**A:** This is an age and situation when fantasy and daydreams are actually healthier than action. It's very common for teenagers to have crushes on teachers, as it's a time of romantic urges and heightened sexual interest, yet there are still fears and insecurities about same-age dating.

A teacher who appears kind and interested in you as an individual becomes seen as an ideal love object. Letting your imagination go can be fun, but making any move to connect with her can snap you back to reality in a harsh and hurtful way.

I'm sure if this teacher realized she'd sparked a major crush, she'd stop chatting and probably avoid you. Any move on your part to contact her might even cause a reaction from the principal, and more public knowledge of your feelings. They're misdirected.

Start getting to know girls your own age. Real-life romance may be nearby.

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The Lacanian purview can well explain the above scenario that is described in a popular advise column and included here to provide an example of how the complexities of the pedagogical relationship have entered the popular lexicon of 'common knowledge'. The feelings of unity and harmony that are part of early infant experience have long receded for both this student and his teacher. The student, in voicing his concerns to the

advice columnist, situates himself firmly in the region of the Symbolic--he is using language to talk about absence and otherness, enacting the structure of his unconscious mind, which Lacan says is structured *like* a language. Student and teacher are, or potentially are one another's *objet petit a*. The student figures the relationship as potentially romantic and/or sexual; this is not surprising given that, at 16 years of age, sex and intimacy are easily confused and that the student has had little time to learn other ways of negotiating desire, such as through vocation. Desire in the teacher is mediated by and through pedagogy and school culture, but since desire of the kind Lacan describes is not satiable, this teacher seeks professional connection even with students outside her class, something that puzzles the student and leads to his only partial misinterpretation. Interestingly, the columnist speaks of the 'ideal love object' and refers to a 'harsh and hurtful' reality, both of which make sense in the Lacanian complex. She advocates a retreat into fantasy, but to conceive of external school culture and internal complexes of desire as discrete and mutually exclusive preserves does a disservice to what is going on:

> To make an easy distinction between the social and the psyche, locating authority in the social sphere and desire in the psyche is to oversimplify. Social and psychological forces are inextricably bound, each shaping and altering the other in perpetual exchange, the tensions between them often revealed in works of the imagination. (Keroes, 1999, 2).

Keroes goes on to make the point that teachers serve *in loco parentis*; as teachers assume the role of parent, so too do they take on the role of object of sexual desire that the parent once held. (There is the possibility that teachers, themselves all students once, select the profession in an attempt to perform an end-run around parental desire by becoming that figure of authority.) In several senses then, teachers can "become objects of submerged romantic longing. As such, they are convenient figures on whom to map psychological

as well as social conflicts" (Keroes, 1999, 3). But in what way does this mapping take place? What guides such a process? An advice columnist? The Mary Kay LeTourneau story? Or, as in the case of the student who wrote to a columnist for help, the usual romantic scripts the culture makes available to men and women? What scripts do teachers themselves follow? What role does the work of the Hollywood imagination play?

In the idealized world of most cinematic classrooms, sexual desire is coded as the desire for knowledge[1]. Students' desire will be fulfilled by learning; the teacher's by being the catalyst for that learning. And in the true Lacanian sense, this desire can never be fulfilled. For, when the student learns all that the teacher has to offer, the relationship reaches its completion and the student must move on, must leave the nest to seek a greater knowledge elsewhere. For the teacher, when her job is done she must accept the fact that her desire too is unsatiated as she must inevitably turn her gaze to a new crop of students. There is no end point, no culmination or climax, as the march of new students every year is perpetual, a dance of intersubjective desire that is akin to serial monogamy in a capitalist age--wherein each participant acts out the social script that is expected of them before beginning the same script over in a new union. Repetition, for the teacher, becomes a closed circuit of desire, on the hub of aging where her students seem younger each year while her own distance from childhood feelings of union grows, exacerbated by the demands of youth culture and educational demands for novelty and newness in teaching approaches. It is a similar case for students. Their perception of the teacher is

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[1] The Lacanian concept of desire can be described as the longing which persists once the physical needs of the self have been met. It is rooted in the sense of lack first experienced when the child realizes that its own mother is an entity entirely seperate from itself, and seeks to fill the resultantant lack, to fulfill desire, by receiving from the other that which the self lacks. That which is desired Lacan calls the *objet petit a*,

as locked in time as the teacher's role itself; students carry forward in their memory moments of classroom tableaux, bodies in space and time and dynamic interaction, pregnant with the promise desire brings but finally figures apart.

The erotic connotations of the term 'desire' will resonate implicitly in my analysis while at the same time occupying a mid-point between Lacanian and Foucauldian thinking. But it will also be deployed at times to indicate simply the generalized need of teachers to have a coherent enough sense of professional selfdom to allow them to work purposively and meaningfully.

Lacan sees the "post-specular child" as a "split subject", and we learn from him that the

> ongoing dis-ease of the subject, forever caught in a dialectic between the Imaginary and Symbolic, the fantasized and socially acceptable, and the Self and the Other, provides the clue to the processes of both psychoanalysis and textual [including filmic] interpretation" (Slethaug, 1993, p. 531).

If this subject is always defined by language, then we can speculate on a meaningful connection between the teacher self and film language, a language that is both visual and typographic (this last in the sense that dialogue is based on a given language's rules). The teacher-self, in a psychoanalytic sense, is drawn not only to the cultural practices in which she will seek the sense of unity and harmony she recalls feeling during infant experience, but to *representations* of those practices, including filmic ones (one can imagine how riveted to the screen the student of the advice column would be if watching a movie dealing with a love relationship between student and teacher or younger man and older woman). This psychoanalytic context is particularly important in the case of

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and in desire can be found the belief that to possess this object will allow the self to become whole once again.

teachers because parents are our first teachers, and the teaching function is mentally aligned in our imaginations with older persons, the role of the student falling generally to those who are younger.

There is an important connection between desire and power, given that teachers seek to have an effect on young people and that effect follows from the conscious use of power (benevolent, punitive, or all manner of degrees between). The desire to act as a teacher involves the desire to wield at least sufficient power to affect others. Here, Foucault (1982) is useful. If we take his view that power is a socially determined set of relations, then it becomes necessary to speak of teachers in relation to all of the factors I have outlined so far in this writing--a level of complexity adequate to theorizing both the power positions teachers occupy and their relation to myriad factors that determine the constitution and functioning of their identities. Codes and disciplines determine power relations; these relations get represented in cultural narratives; narratives/representations can be studied to ascertain the nature of socially dominant codes; and speculation can proceed apace at the juncture where the codes, filmically and narratively encrypted, meet teachers' desire for self-definition and the way to social power through classroom teaching. "(N)ovels and other popular texts merit our attention not so much because they transcend their time and place but because they offer powerful illustrations of the way a culture thinks about itself." (Keroes, 1999, p 2)

**The Pleasure (and Danger) of the Test**

While cinematic representations of teachers that portray members of our profession in the heroic, self-sacrificial role garner predominant approval, there remains a line which these figures, and their real-life models, may not overstep without incurring widespread communal reproach. So long as expression of teacher desire results in adherence to the traditional pedagogical relationship (wherein teacher is servant to student) the result, should the teacher act to fulfill her own desire through this relationship, is uncompromising societal censure. To find evidence of the extent to which a culture polices its own narratives--and of the extent to which pedagogical desire, sublimated and repressed though occasionally erupting in forbidden actions, forbidden social scripts, is strictly coded, one need only turn to media treatments of pedagogical transgressions. Consider the case of Heather Ingram, a teacher who experiences what Roland Barthes (1973) calls bliss or *jouissance* whenever she tests the limits of acceptable teacher behaviour:

# 'I thought with my heart'

## Disgraced teacher tells Oprah story of forbidden love

MARKE ANDREWS
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE
VANCOUVER

Five years after her affair with a student, former Sechelt, B.C., high school teacher Heather Ingram was in the public eye again Friday.

Ingram, who was convicted of sexual exploitation of a minor and stripped of her teaching certificate after she admitted to a 1999 affair with a 17-year-old student, appeared Friday on the Oprah Winfrey Show in an episode titled The Worst Mistake of My Life.

Ingram, now 34, shared the show with Nanie Reynolds, a 30-year-old Arizona high school counsellor who posed nude for a magazine.

The half-hour segment began with videotaped sequences showing Ingram and her lover, Dusty Dickeson, re-enacting scenes from their affair.

Winfrey then interviewed Ingram before Dickeson, the father of Ingram's infant son, joined the session.

The couple sat closely together, holding hands at times.

"I was so naive," Ingram said of embarking on the affair.

She said she believed the public would empathize with her when they learned the couple was in love.

Ingram, still living on B.C.'s Sunshine Coast, was married and teaching at Chatelech Secondary School in 1999 when she engaged in the affair with Dickeson.

After being found guilty of sexual exploitation of a minor, she was placed under a 10-month house arrest.

Ingram lost her teaching career and her common-law marriage with another man collapsed.

On the show, Ingram said that Dickeson flirted with her for a year before there was any sexual contact. During that period, he asked her for dates on several occasions. She turned him down, saying that maybe after he graduated they could go out.

However, when he showed up at her door one night with two friends, who subsequently left the couple alone, the two began a sexual relationship.

Asked by Winfrey why she didn't wait a few months until her young lover had graduated, she said, "I thought with my heart, not my head."

When Ingram mentioned on several occasions how unhappy she had been in her 11-year common-law relationship, Winfrey accused her of using it as an excuse to proceed with Dickeson.

Ingram agreed.

Herald Archive, CanWest News Service
Fired teacher Heather Ingram went on the Oprah Winfrey show on Friday to talk about the affair she had with a 17-year-old student.

--reproduced with permission from *The Calgary Herald*

Barthes makes a distinction between the *pleasure* that is born of reading a text and experiencing confirmation of one's beliefs or knowledge and the *bliss* or disturbing rapture that results when reading leads to an unsettling of one's cultural assumptions.

Ingram's claim is telling: when she reads the social text of her society, she does not take pleasure in convention, so *thinks* with her *heart*--she authors (through her behaviour and speech acts) her own text of bliss wherein she enjoys walking the line between taking pleasure in teaching and experiencing bliss in transgressing acceptable teacher roles. It is an essentially erotic act, for as Barthes says, "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so" (1977, p. 6). Most widespread, public, or commercial social scripts--the region of 'thought' or rationality that regulates education--cannot account for an unconscious desire to experience bliss ('heart' or irrationality), so a dichotomy is set up, pitting the two against each other. The teacher movie is a restless symptom of frustration with this dichotomy as it seeks to explore the seam, the fault, and the flaw that separate unexpressed teacher desires and decorum. Ingram, conceivably, could not find a way to negotiate classroom complexes of desire, so she inserted the body directly into the formula of her relationship with a student, and in so doing, ran afoul of a widespread pedagogical taboo. The violation is sufficient enough to be immediately recognized by Oprah, the self-appointed maven of all our televisual moments of catharsis, as prime material for commercial investigation into unconscious motivations. Waiting until after graduation to begin an illicit affair would have utterly diluted the impetus for her desire: it was the pedagogical relationship that she wanted to sexualize. Once graduated, the student would no longer be student to Ingram. And the underage component is obviously important, in that it is perhaps a sense of lost innocence that Ingram is attempting to regain.

Pedagogy involves a delicate balance of power, so it is no surprise that often in films and television shows, teachers are represented on the horns of one or another

dilemma relating to power relations: as both seducer and seduced, as captor and liberator, as conventional dogmatist and liberal kook, as casualties themselves of the education system for which they are representative or as leading perpetrator of any harm which that system might inflict on its charges. Such representations are rife with desire in the Lacanian sense, sexual desire, and issues of power. These are *privileged* representations, for reasons I will shortly enumerate, and these narratives both inaugurate suture and perpetrate legitimacy of their content. Through analysis of these images and their inherent message, we come closer to an understanding of how our culture broadly views the pedagogical relationship, and thereby of how this meta-narrative of "what is teacher" can impact the enactment of such practice in our classrooms daily.

Before turning to *The Emperor's Club* itself, I would like to sound a cautionary note about desire in much of contemporary writing on desire and pedagogy, particularly in light of the fact that I drew on the Ingram case above. In no way do I suggest that Ingram was guiltless in her choice to insert the body into structures of desire that pre-existed her choice anyway. Her failing, in my view, is that she allowed her own identity formations to eclipse those of the other and that she allowed them to function in relative isolation from that other. By the end of her appearance on *Oprah*, her bad choice is still fully functioning; the interview allowed her *to once again stage her moment of transgression, to relive the bliss of making the power relations she was enmeshed in serve her ego.* The very fact *that it was wrong of her* is what allows her to act enjoyably on unconscious desires. She is reveling in her exercise of power over the student and in her defiance of norms of teacher-student interaction. I explain later that it is a subtle will to abuse of pedagogical power that is engaged with, Oprah style, in *The Emperor's Club*,

a strange mix of transgression and guilt that is seldom acknowledged by viewers and not at all by the ideological tenor that prevails by the close of the movie. But my point here is that in some criticism related to desire and pedagogy, the eclipsing of other inside the fold of critique is a danger. In an excellent essay entitled "Education and the Subject of Desire", Frank Pignatelli begins with a quote from John Dewey:

> Need and desire--out of which grow purpose and energy--go beyond what exists, and hence beyond knowledge, beyond science. They continually open the way into the unexplored and unattained future. (1999, p.1)

Note here the tenor of the heroic mode, an almost frontier rhetoric of beyondness and opening up, and, as with peoples of countries 'civilized' by colonial expansion of frontiers, it is the body of those who must learn that the expansion is engrafted upon. Need and desire may just as easily be conceived of as the twin engines of oppression, war, and environmental degradation, so much so that Dewey's words sound almost like a strategy of containment. Now consider these comments by Keroes:

> The pedagogical exchange is a connection marked by the pleasures of potentiality: for the student, the promise of a most powerful self, for the teacher, not just the further exercises of a power already claimed but also the possibility of a lost innocence....The student's desire for knowledge and its pleasures, to know and be known, is drawn to the one who possesses that knowledge--a figure construed at once as parent, mentor and lover. By offering her knowledge in response to the student's search for relationship, the teacher testifies to an implicit link between knowing and loving. (Keroes, 1999, p. 3)

This may indeed be an accurate description of the hidden feelings beneath the student-teacher relationship--sometimes. Where is there room in this view for students who need to respond to a teacher in a much different way in order to pursue an idiosyncratic identity formation, perhaps one that in no way may construe the teacher as anything more than one of many authority figures to be negotiated? It is no longer enough to be mentor;

a teacher must now usurp the role of parent *and* function as lover. In short, become all things to all students--this hovers at the edge of a pedagogy of fascism in that there should be no will towards such totality. There seems, in this, an accumulating to oneself here of many roles inside a pedagogy of omnipotence--the view is extremely self-flattering.

It is part of what is now a general excitement in pedagogical critique over the acknowledgment that the teacher-student relationship can be conceived of in libidinal terms. I am reminded of an essay published in *Harper's Magazine* entitled "The Higher Yearning: Bringing Eros Back to Academe", by Cristina Nehring (2001) who teaches at UCLA. Nehring's rhetoric is persuasive in parts, dwelling as she does on the most famous of teacher-student relationships: Heloise and Abelard, Heidegger and Arendt, Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudelle, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, Socrates and Alcibiades. And she writes convincingly of the potential desire has to negotiate power relationships in the educational institution:

> One of the astonishing strengths of love and sex is that it can make boundaries between people so easy to break. It can glide, smiling, around social, vocational, and linguistic roadblocks; it can disarm difference, banish history, slice through power divides. It can ease the passage into another culture, mind, generation, or world. As was discovered by Jane Gallop--who seduced her professors as a student and her students as a professor (for which she was accused of sexual harassment in 1992 with far more reason than most)--sex is a great "leveler". (2001, p. 31)

It is an obvious point that her words would not generally apply to underage students at the secondary level, but the important point is the problem that arises when desire--configured in any pedagogical sense--becomes self-regarding, the other reduced to an element in an envisioned narrative of the self.

Lastly, on the conjoined subjects of desire, representation, and pedagogy, consider this segment from Herbert Kohl's narrative on becoming a teacher, quoted by Pignatelli in his discussion of education and desire:

> My first teaching experience was as a companion, friend, and fellow learner. I don't know if our time together was useful to Robert, but it set forces and energy loose in me that have played a central role in my development. I am still trying to understand the character of those forces and the source of that energy....What in our relationship released the teacher in me? I believe it was the pleasure I got from helping him reach out to me and through that experience learn ways of reaching out to other people. I could feel him getting more hopeful about having a place in the world with other people, of being liked, and being of use. (Kohl in Pignatelli, 1999, p.1)

Kohl reveals here an unconscious desire, not to experience pleasure in reading his own situation and finding confirmation of his accepted teacher role but to feel the bliss that comes of running afoul of that role. There is an accumulation of personal pronouns; 'me' or 'my' five times and 'I' five times, but the other, figured as either 'Robert' or 'him', rates only three mentions. The experience was catalyst and touchstone for Kohl, was a 'pleasure', but his enjoyment and mode of expression sound curiously divorced from regard for the other: he says that he could 'feel' his student open up to the world yet curiously admits earlier that he does not know if the time he spent with his charge 'was useful to Robert.' His rapture likely results from the loss of consistency in his selfhood, a loss that comes of eclipsing the other in his language. There is a worrisome element in both this type of criticism *and* in *The Emperor's Club*: the moment of ecstasy appears when a teacher eclipses both the student and the learning moment in an unexamined plunge into aberrant behaviour that seems bent on accruing more power to, and an enhanced sense of the teacher self. The teacher becomes the selfish lover inside a rhetoric of commingling. Consider Kohl's 'pleasure' (which is really *jouissance*) in

"helping him *reach out to me*" in relation to the following screen capture from *The Emperor's Club* (a *mise-en-scène* analysis of this image follows in a section below):

StarPulse.Com, (1999)

**Ideological Dissonance and the Consequences for Identity in *The Emperor's* Club: Part One, The Narrative**

> In everyone's life there's that one person
> who makes all the difference.
> ~ The Emperor's Club

Stephen Heath claims that "cinema does not efface the signs of production, it contains them" (1996, p. 352). Any screening or home viewing of *The Emperor's Club* conveys to viewers the fact of the film's copyright, established in 2002--the notice is very much part of the film's running time. This is of importance to Canadian film educators because they cannot legally and ideologically re-frame film contents in classrooms by showing a U.S. film and then remarking upon the narratives unless their educational institution pays the studio for the right to do so (by purchasing, for example, a site license). Educators in the U.S. need make no such payment. This arrangement is an entrenched part of international copyright agreement. Presumably, U.S. legislators do not trust educational re-framing of films by foreigners in academic contexts. Film (including its ideological contents) as a commodity deserving of copyright and the notion of intellectual property *per se* are deeply rooted in the capitalist practice of filmmaking Hollywood style. Is there anything within the film narrative of *The Emperor's Club* that directly contains signs of production?

Yes--the very narrative content of the film itself contains them. It cannot be forgotten that by the close of the story, a teacher who sought to directly affect events in the world is very much contained: his professional ethics pick perpetually at his liver (since he dared to rise above his station as *one who prepares young people for action, rather than take action himself*), he is allowed to rise no further in the administrative

hierarchy of the school, he can affect very little beyond the walls of his classroom, and of the two main students he encounters during the story time of the film, both are finally indifferent to his message, to his rhetorical power in the classroom which is finally revealed as that, rhetorical, or merely symbolic at best. Further, he cannot change the core beliefs of a senator's son, nor of the senator himself; he may not run the school, a role that falls to a man who understands the politics of fundraising and benefactor acquisition far better than Hundert; he cannot make his teachings operative in the world at large; he is not at ease or at home in the halls of wealth; he cannot emerge into American sunlight to play baseball without smashing a window and thereby reminding himself of his place, which is literally and figuratively *in* the school and away from the world of effects. By the close of the film, he is in his classroom, ready to welcome and teach students in the same exact and unchanging manner he always has (the motto of the school--"The end depends upon the beginning" is thus ironic because Hundert's beginning and end in this film are identical). He may offer a classical education designed to create the good citizen, but his role is functional only in terms of providing basic, then advanced skills, as well as a prestigious prep school degree to persons who go on to adopt social scripts provided them very much outside the classroom. Teacher movies such as this may be construed as late capitalism's way of pushing education as product, as telling us not to take the ideas of idealistic teachers too seriously. This movie works as a cautionary tale of a teacher who failed in his aims, failed in his efforts to challenge the status quo, and failed to recognize the *problems* with the status quo that would have allowed for meaningful engagement on his part with society.

But the earnest and grand musical score of the film, as well as certain saccharine narrative elements parachuted in, do not suggest failure at all. They suggest transformation and triumph. They herald a great teacher, who only errs once, quickly realizes his error and is vindicated by subsequent events. By the close, idealism is rung in like a returning emperor but is only the property of a small child, Sedgewick's, and a teacher-loner, making the point for audiences that you will not get far materially in this world as an idealist and that your teacher would be disappointed in you if you sold out. And that is all. One is easily reminded of the online commentator quoted above who did not like the movie (no wonder, considering Hundert's stark ineffectivity) but felt she *had* to like it because it was about teachers, and likely because it was in the heroic mode, musically and narratively. A taste of both is readily available for sampling at the movie's official website: http://www.theemperorsclub.com/

One may very easily read against the narrative of this movie, and justifiably so, given the contradictions of the text that are apparent along the way. *The Emperor's Club* is so named because of the deep-rooted connection that forms between students through their intense study of Roman emperors, of ancient civilizations, and of the very history of our own Western democracy. Nevertheless, the title more aptly describes the relationship between these young men and the emperors of antiquity in that they will, by virtue of their birthright of class and privilege, become the leaders of industry and government in the present day. Hundert does not so much preside as a philosopher-citizen over young minds who will, after receiving instruction from him, commit themselves to the good of their *polis*; rather, he facilitates the young men's ability to

legitimate their own class privilege through learning, that is, to gain consent from lower classes through non-coercive means by appealing to the richness of their learning.

No setting is more conducive to the learning of non-coercive, subtle, studied, hegemonic suasion than that of the New England prep school. So successful was *The Dead Poet's Society* at inscribing this site as part of the teacherly, cultural imaginary, as well as the same ideologically conflicting message for teachers, that producers of *The Emperor's Club* hoped that viewers would think of the earlier film. Indeed, many times during the press junket leading up to the film's release, Kevin Kline described this project as "the Dead Poet's Society, with a twist".

*The Emperor's Club* was directed by Michael Hoffman and is set in 1973. Teacher William Hundert (Kevin Kline) is a Classics teacher at the *St. Benedict's School for Boys*. He has succeeded in having his teaching style, as well as his general bearing and comportment, echo the character of classical scholars whose ideas on ethics, morals, and citizenship he extols. The film narrative begins with the onset of a new academic year and with Hundert initiating discussions on parallels between Greco/Roman structures of government and those of contemporary, democratic America. The very comparison itself is a legitimating strategy for the political status quo. To be sure, the constitutional democracy in the U.S. is strong and is based upon a number of honourable, antecedent precepts and ideas. But the comparison is essentially an argument from tradition, one that places U.S. history inside a teleology that is all the more legitimate given that the American empire is construed as a noble culmination of the Democratic spirit. When a new student, Sedgewick Bell (Emile Hirsch) arrives--a petulant, uninterested child of privilege who disrupts the class--the narrative encourages us to see

his rebellious sense of class entitlement as *straying* from the true American path of democratic pursuit of individual happiness and justice for all and Hundert as the moral conscience that will bring him into the fold, when in fact, Sedgewick is *the culmination and natural product of the class system, not a deviation from it.* We would do well to admit Baudrillard (1983) and his argument in *Simulations* where he suggests that protests against Nixon, along with that president's eventual fall from political grace, did not show us that the system works, but that the system produced a Nixon.

Bell has been expelled from several schools, is a poor student, and is bent of inciting other students to lack luster efforts and behaviour that breaks school rules. He shows obvious disinterest in his studies, is disruptive in and out of class, and even entices some of his fellow students to misbehave. His father is a Senator from West Virginia, one who has presumably relinquished his responsibilities as a parent by leaving Sedgewick in the care of teachers. Hundert visits Senator Hyram Bell (Harris Yulin) to explain that Sedgewick is in trouble and that he, Hundert, cannot 'mold him in the *St. Benedict* tradition.' The Senator, contraband Cuban cigar in hand, sternly instructs Hundert that the molding of the boy's character is to be done by family, not by a teacher. By this point in the film, as viewers are comfortably and bodily ensconced in Cineplex or home viewing comfort, we have thus far encountered the embodiment of political idealism in Hundert, have seen firmly emplaced within him a tradition- and time-honoured curriculum, have been narratively manipulated to view his efforts as unproblematically noble, and have been given a parent who is mere type--a politician who does not play by his country's rules (he defies the embargo on Cuban exports). Where does such a setting up attempt to situate viewer sympathies? Firmly with Hundert, but the problem is that in

that moment of suturing, wherein in any teacher who has crossed swords with what seems a negligent parent is bound to identify with the teacher figure on display, teacher viewers take up Hundert's crucible. They, like Hundert, do not understand (because the narrative alone cannot provide this understanding) that what is being acted out is a complex set of social scripts designed to protect the status quo. The state, peopled by and largely supportive of the dominant class, desires self-perpetuation, and one of its legitimating arms is education, curriculum. This arm teaches political awareness, history ethics, and broader understanding can thus come home to roost when ideals learned about in the classroom do not mesh with political, class reality. Democratic debate then ensues wherein teachers are reminded that *loco parentís* has definite limits. The debate allows us to believe that the culture encourages debate as a preface to change, but elitist political processes continue unabated underneath the radar of ethical debate and, indeed, are the stronger, for how (a viewer/American may well wonder) can corruption and/or class dominance prevail in a country that seems so engaged in healthy debate? *This is the very reason that the adult Sedgewick, still utterly corrupted, uses the reunion of the emperor's club members, the test re-match, and the announcement of his gift of money to the school, as a springboard from which to launch his political candidacy; he is simply using the school to do what it was in part designed to do--legitimate the pedigree of the ruling class and help facilitate its perpetuation, its ascension of new members to the halls of power.* Instead of the film functioning as an object lesson in the Byzantine deployment of legitimation tactics, it attempts to celebrate a teacher who grapples with an unjust system in the name of ethics that will surely prevail in a system like America's which is supposedly as self-regulatory in terms of moral practice as it is in markets. But Hundert

gains no awareness of the system in which he is a cog--and neither does the teacher-viewer who is freshly sutured to his crucible, eagerly deriving an identity from that suture.

Hundert proceeds to make the same mistake as does the character of John Keating in *Dead Poet's Society*. Going wholly against parental proscription, Hundert attempts to reclaim Sedgewick, to essentially use the child as a means by which to do battle with the father. In terms of pedagogical desire, Hundert attempts to displace the father in terms of Sedgewick's affections, to be bodily near as the father is not, to certainly *not* expel Sedgewick from the student body but to enmesh him in Hundert's own identity coordinates and economy of belief. To have Sedgewick reach up his hand eagerly towards the father-teacher to joyously complete the equations of Socratic questioning. For Hundert is alone unless that connection is made, alone with history on dead paper and with dead precepts that cannot live unless acted out in the classroom and taken out into the world.

Hundert's approach is to enforce upon Sedgewick, as he does upon all his students, learning by rote. Oddly, he seems to think that by committing facts to memory, a student will be able to consciously apply raw data in an organic manner to the power structures of one's own life. We hear no lessons on how to do this, and instead only see memorization tasks at work. Hundert is so zealous that he changes Sedgewick's grade on an exam for the better, unjustifiably, so that Sedgewick will be one of only three contestants at the 58th annual Julius Caesar competition, in which three students are asked trivia questions about the classics and where the winner becomes Mr. Caesar. It is more than strange that so many

teachers and indeed film reviewers would be willing to praise the depiction of a teacher who relies exclusively on lecture, rote learning, and knowledge as trivia in the game show style of *Jeopardy!* or *Reach for the Top.*

And the format of *Jeopardy!* is highly recognizable to contemporary moviegoers. Viewers see on that program pictures of sentences when the camera focuses on any one of the array of television screen-shaped game boards which bear the answers to which contestants must supply the appropriate questions. Language is likely nowhere better subsumed into the consumerist ethos than in this example. Facts such as Eva Braun's shoe size or which politician said what at the height of the Cuban missile crisis become factoids entirely devoid of context except for one: that of a game the aim of which is the accrual of cash winnings. The most trivia-inclined contestant receives the most money, the actual cash amount of which is on prominent electronic display on the front of each contestant's podium. The interspersion of commercials during the game completes the sequence of commercial rhetoric: knowledge has a clear utility, namely, the pursuit of a financial gain which offers the power to select the goods of one's choice from a sumptuous and handy catalogue in the form of commercials. Knowledge is purchasing power. In the economy of Hundert's classroom, knowledge bestows cultural capital while installing in incredibly naive belief, namely, that those most able to memorize data will rise to the halls of power, when in fact, if history teachings nothing else, it is military power or sophisticated and duplicitous social persuasion that enables such ascension, and that idealistic dissenters need to embark on politically imagined revolution, not

prep school classics quizzes the teachings of which are cast in a hopelessly romantic mode.

To elevate Sedgewick in terms of grades (in an effort to bond his student to the material by facilitating the warm sense of satisfaction that comes with a good grade), Hundert lowers the score of Martin Blythe III (Paul Franklin Dano), whose father had won the competition himself as a student. Martin is crushed. This bothers Hundert, briefly, but is soon forgotten. Martin has been cast in a supporting role, a member of the upper crust as his place at *St. Benedicts* indicates, but a follower--never a leader, and as such the viewer is lead to experience no sense of outrage when Sedgewick takes Martin's place in the competition. The day of the contest arrives, and Sedgewick is doing well, until Hundert notices that he is cheating, but is instructed by the headmaster to "let it go". Instead, Hundert devises a particularly difficult question that Sedgewick cannot answer: Sedgewick comes in second. Hundert confronts Sedgewick privately after the contest, asking why he would cheat, sincerely believing that Sedgewick could have been successful without the crutch; "You knew the material". Sedgewick doesn't explain, instead asking why Hundert didn't call him out for cheating, guessing correctly that Hundert would not report him. Sedgewick believes this is because of the influence of his father. It is possible that Hundert keeps the secret due to his own collusion in the cheat, after all he himself cheated to put Sedgewick into the competition. Nevertheless, we know that the Headmaster's instruction to "let it go" was indeed motivated by the power and influence of Sedgewick's father, so Hundert is not being entirely truthful when he says that his decision not to disqualify Sedgewick during the match had nothing to do with the father, Senator Bell. Lest we, the audience, do not grasp the shame of Hundert's

silence regarding this incident of cheating, its poignancy is summed up for us by James Ellerby (Rob Morrow). He says that Sedgewick's decision to cheat is because "the pressure to succeed can be oppressive" an utterly ridiculous claim given that, while yes, the Darwinian salmon-run of American capitalism can be hard on everyone, the promotion of a wealthy and privileged cheater will virtually guarantee continued class oppression. Further, Ellerby mistakenly reminds Hundert that Sedgewick "got there on his own merit--all you did was inspire him." Alas, if only it were true. Hundert says nothing; Kline looks ashamed although it is not clear if this is an attempt to act as Hundert might feel, or a response to the script's ham-handed attempt to guide the viewers response to the action.

This dirty deal marks a turning point - *the dye is cast* - and Sedgewick is unruly/unfocused/uninterested in his studies and outright disrespectful to the St. Benedict's tradition and faculty for the rest of his time there. Nevertheless, he continues to provide an unofficial leadership to the young men in his class; "his affect on them was almost hypnotic." His grades upon graduation are poor, yet he is accepted to Yale because of his father's influence. As he bestows Sedgewick's diploma, Hundert experiences a "profound sense of failure." It is important to note that Hundert's focus during this moment of voiced-over sentiment is not on 'failure to teach a student' or 'failure to help change the political order' but on *his sense* of failure--in other words, on the disparity between his overweening sense of his teacher self and his ability to effect change in line with the precepts of that identity.

At some point during this stage of his career Hundert is appointed Assistant Headmaster, and upon the death of Headmaster Woodbridge (Edward Herrmann)

seventeen years later, he succeeds to the position of Acting Headmaster. However, the Board of Trustees selects Ellerby as the new Headmaster, citing his "impeccable moral standing and unwavering commitment to this school." The appointment of Ellerby, a teacher Hundert himself was instrumental in hiring, and who for years had politicked to become Headmaster, so mortifies Hundert that he decides to retire despite the board's urging of him to continue teaching. He takes up writing, but it becomes obvious to both Hundert and the viewer that he is not made for this craft, a solitary pursuit far from the classroom space, without audience. The new Headmaster visits to inform Hundert about an unusual request relating to a proposed donation, the largest in the school's history, by Sedgewick Bell (played now by Joel Gretsch), now a billionaire CEO. The request, a condition of the donation, is to have a rematch of the Mr. Caesar competition, with Hundert again presiding. Hundert accepts, goes to Sedgewick's palatial estate, meets his former students, and presides over the rematch.

When Hundert observes that Sedgewick is again cheating, he asks a question about an inscription on a plaque in his classroom that he once directed his students' attentions to. He knows Sedgewick will not be able to answer, for although we are led to believe that the other students would know the correct response because they were more studious than Sedgewick, in truth Hundert taught about the plaque on the first day of class, before Sedgewick entered the school. Sedgewick loses again, but uses the occasion to announce his candidacy for Senate anyway, with the support of his past-classmates. Afterward, in the men's room, Hundert confronts Sedgewick, and the latter admits that his philosophy is cutthroat, that he will do anything to get ahead, while Hundert reminds him that the *St. Benedict* experience was supposed to mold character. Hundert again fails

to recognize that Sedgewick's character was indeed molded, but in the image of the boy's father and *by* the father. Although it is clear that Hundert was entirely ineffective in this regard, the narrative tone of the film presents him as a noble teacher for having been so deeply wounded by his own failure to exert influence beyond the classroom to the extent he would have liked.

The narrative of the film clearly suggests that Hundert errs, but what exactly does it suggest the error is? Specifically, that the teacher himself cheats. Less specifically, that he plays into, rather than resists the ushering in to the echelons of achievement the socially privileged, though undeserving student. But his error is more complex than that. If he lets Sedgewick fail, then the student will not be able to rise up against his father ideologically and thereby confirm Hundert-Teacher as the proper steward of young men's characters. Dissolute failure on Sedgewick's part might have frustrated his entrance into politics, perhaps stopped it altogether. *But to confirm his sense of himself as a force that matters in the world, as possessing a coherent teacher identity that he himself had constructed out of classical materials, he acts on pedagogical hubris and selfish desire and elevates the least deserving of his students.* True, he later regrets his decision, but only in some abstract, narrow, and child-like sense of the certainty that cheating is wrong. His overbearing and ego-driven desire to unite with student and world, to be seen in the American sunlight that he is always cut off from in his cloister and to initiate effects there, is entirely unexamined by him at the close of the film. He admits to Martin Blythe III (whose very name smacks of patrilineal privilege) that he placed Sedgewick over him, but viewers must note carefully Blythe's response: he is entirely indifferent, facially at the time of Hundert's admission, and parentally in that he later sends his own son to

Hundert's school and classroom. Blythe understands what viewers frequently do not--that Hundert poses no threat to anyone in any way, shape, or form. Hundert is a child himself in that after he cheats; all he can do is enact the script of the schoolboy who should honourably confess to his transgression. Indeed, Hundert is childlike and petulant throughout the film, particularly when he quits his job (basically taking his ball and going home) once he is denied advancement in the school's administrative hierarchy--he dispenses with teaching altogether because of hurt feelings. Viewers are meant to feel that Sedgewick gets his comeuppance when his small son overhears Sedgewick's gloating to Hundert in a washroom that cheaters prosper, but in light of the overall political ineffectiveness of Hundert's own cheating and subsequent admission, the moment seems hollow.

So what are viewers left with at the end of the narrative? A teacher whose bid for a teaching identity that enables worldly exercises of power only enables abuses of power by others. A teacher who cannot piece out of the classics a clear understanding of the politics of his society. A teacher who, when the moment is forced to a crisis, can only act out a schoolboy's contrition to his class. A teacher who accepts the 'proper' social script for teachers in that, by the end, he sacrifices himself by committing to a Sisyphus-like role wherein he appears condemned to roll his moral-ethical precepts up a hill only to see them crash down when students enter the world of class privilege that his school facilitates acceptance in.

A lack of understanding of the workings of the cultural field is evident in both Hundert's and Keating's wanton disregard of the complexities of where and how students are situated upon the cultural field; they simply want to make the students elements in

their own heroic narrative and do not see the dangers of taking isolated action in the name of what the teaching self deems worthwhile. Hundert and Keating are loners who do not teach well within the community. They are very much alone with a desire, the dynamics of which they arrange and fuel in relation to their own mental processes alone, rather than in relation to community--each is very like Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita*, a teacher figure meditating alone on the alchemy of desire.

Hundert is a creature of sequestration, of learning and history. His virtue is fugitive. When he changes the grade, he seals his fate as a cog in the bourgeois social machinery that is largely antithetical to the classical virtues he extols, but more importantly, antithetical to the highly politicized teacher who desires to place his teaching self in relation to the student other in a manner that empowers that other. It is an effort to usher in not only mutual and positive identity formations but to kick start effective social praxis. Such power is dangerous to the ideological order *The Emperor's Club* shrewdly affirms.

**A Note on the Dream Factory**

From the commercial studios of the last fifty years have come a number of teacher movies that have created a mini-genre, a tradition, the hallmarks of which are so well known, the features so well circulated in myriad forms, that audiences know how to respond (with saccharine, knee-jerk admiration for the committed teacher) and directors how to musically score (with swelling tones of inspirational awe). But what is precisely on sale are characterizations of damaged yet noble creatures that play to a subterranean desire; viewers want to see the teacher fail, to see one who judged us undone by the profession that was, at times, our bane while growing up. Such movies play to this wish fulfillment while at the same time presenting us with figures undone by too rigid a sense of the teaching self that, despite its failings, remains the spur in a teacher's life to continue as a troubled and self-sacrificial entity who perseveres in the name of teaching. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the pedagogue gives up her womanly prime *and* a commitment to egalitarianism; in *Stand and Deliver*, the teacher almost dies of a heart attack; and in *Dead Poet's Society*, the instructor triggers a teen suicide and is cast out; in *Mr. Holland's Opus*, Holland ignores both his family and his own musical art; Hundert is tormented by his failings and the social ineffectiveness of his lessons. The cultural imaginary seems to want its teachers to suffer. The very idea of a screen depiction of a teacher who offers a dull yet very efficient toolbox with which students may effect social change; draws clear professional lines between her profession (which she expects adequate funding for, as well as good working conditions) and her private life; and who

allows students to fail in order not to protect the larger society from the awareness that socioeconomic inequality engenders failures that education cannot always counter, seems utterly unthinkable. Such a film offers no dance of sensationalist desire, between either screen characters or teaching self and screen. Hollywood is the dream factory, a generator of light and colour offering up to the god of identity formation wish fulfillment, dramatic cruxes, tension-laden crucibles, the mental freedom of the "what if". There is in this promise and danger. The promise lies in that we may allow the dynamism of our own personalities to play out through imagined narratives and thereby initiating self-reflexive mental play. The danger comes in the entertainment corporation successfully incorporating the viewing subject into its own economies, textual and financial, creating teachers whose dramas of the self, freshly adopted from the screen teacher *du jour*, eclipse awareness of the functioning of that self in a larger political context. The modern corporation requires above all else a stable investment climate. Separatist nationalism, cultural upheaval, and exploded class struggles are all anathema to this business entity. So why would a major entertainment corporation, such as Universal Pictures in the case of *The Emperor's Club*, offer a teacher who is recognizable, yet polysemic, other focused but not self-sacrificial, and mainstream in her position but radical in her politics? Such a subject is too complex for classical Hollywood narrative, potentially too antithetical to a narrative tradition that requires clear scapegoats (through which to initiate the easy, bijou catharsis), heroes who suffer, and sites of political explosion properly contained in order to maintain the status quo outside the theatre.

**Ideological Dissonance and the Consequences for Identity in *The Emperor's* Club: Part Two, The Individual Image**

The Soul Never Thinks Without
a Mental Image.
--Aristotle

*Mise-en-scène* analysis can reveal many likely trajectories of teacher subjectivity formations simply by virtue of the fact that conscious and unconscious image retention is one of the most deeply evolved and powerful pre-cognitive and cognitive functions of the human brain. Our dreams by night are the visual playground of the subconscious, our imaginations by day envision diverse possibilities in the world and in the future, and our visual cortex veritably demands images of the world, even generating its own if denied external stimuli in cognitive experiments. The image itself, and arrays of images harnessed under copyright are, of course, commodities in an age of digital image reproduction. Image clusters circulate in the culture at large, every bit as much a part of the symbolic economy as money itself--they carry weight, value, power, influence, and cultural capital. Film genres or formulas carry a shelf life, as is evident in at least one review of *The Emperor's Club*: "Urge to be inspiring takes over another prep school movie" (*Edmonton Journal*, Nov. 12, 2002, E2). If films are undeniably products that may be viewed when a ticket is bought, and if they are bought in a "to buy is to be" culture, what do viewers buy into? The image. So, in-depth analysis of images and the ideological weights they carry is not only a valid line of inquiry, but is also an essential one in any effort to understand Hollywood's role in the normalization of attitudes and practices that ensure the continuance of status quo power structures.

Two other social phenomena are worth mentioning in this context. One is the strange, imagined, and visually celebrated and encouraged perception that the boundaries between electronic screen environments and the psychological/physical viewing self are porous, compromised, and are able to be traversed. The meeting point between viewer and viewed is a two-way portal in films ranging from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (where humans inhabit a cartoon world) to *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (whose protagonist steps off the screen into a theatre), and from *The Truman Show*, where a man's life is in truth only a staged television commercial, to *Pleasantville*, that sees a brother and sister transported into the narrative world of a 50s sitcom. The cultural imaginary increasingly seems bent on offering a type of wish fulfillment that sees the ontological lines between our physical worlds and the screen environments that we increasingly live in to be crossed--imaginatively but also in terms of how we shape our sense of our personal futures. In such a cultural environment, the suggestive power of film is enormous, *and* it becomes the template, the *narrative image bank*, through which we imagine our lives.

The second notable phenomenon worth mentioning here is that contemporary viewers appear to generate and act in accordance with a phantom--an external ocular capacity; we are deeply self-regarding, perennially concerned with how we appear to be imagined by spectral viewers out there in the image culture who are finally only ourselves--in bizarre fashion, we act out Benjamin's contention that "[a]ny man today can lay claim to being filmed" (1969, p. 231). Increasingly, we *are* being filmed more and more, in the sense of hidden surveillance, home video technology, on-line visual exchanges, and the proliferation of mass media cameras in public environments. But that is beside the point--we mentally accept visual photographic culture to such an extent that

we see ourselves as agents in increasingly commercial and visual terms, allowing our identities to function through, and like fictional screen others.

Mass bombardment of instantaneous and mosaic communication cannot help but shape human agency and has even affected language structures born of oral and typographic registers rather than photographic ones; amongst young people today, the phrase "I was like" or "she was like," followed by no words, only a posed facial expression, has become a popular way of expressing emotional reactions to situations. People are learning to communicate facially by peppering their conversations with reaction shots, a nation with visually offered similes increasingly free of words.

Like all forms of communication, the visual image offers possibilities for both liberation and enslavement. Passive viewing, in tandem with media illiteracy and a hostility to critique in general (teachers must ever face the charge of over-reading or "analyzing something to death"), is one of the many cognitive lapses that dominant visual culture can count on amongst viewers whenever it is manufacturing consent. Film can offer catharsis, escape, pleasure, it can spur imagination, it can inform and elicit empathy, but along with these valuable offerings there can be downloaded into conscious and unconscious minds any number of ideological formations useful to hegemonically maintaining the status quo. Ideology can piggyback like a computer virus on more useful functions and data. Assaulted by mirrors in malls, perpetually concerned with appearance, prone to reinvention of oneself along the lines of commercial imperatives--to buy is to be, and whatever is bought gets seen--the modern viewer risks behaving “in

the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 26).

Film is nothing if not a manipulator of the human body. Visual narrative can cognitively arrest a viewer, can literally still the body, glue us to the screen. And there we see the human body in manipulated space and time, amidst props and environments, bathed in light or swathed in darkness, lushly ensconced in screen aesthetics, tortured or made love to there, revealed or suggested in half revealing, pressed against material constraints or flying free of them, delighted or horrified by people or things that hover in tantalizing proxemics, zoomed in upon or dwarfed by perspective, and ever and always accompanied by symbolic content, the march of ideas, consciously installed by cast and crew or finding its way there by accident. *Mise-en-scène* analysis, when applied to the teacher movie, explores the dynamics of the student body, of the figure of the teacher, of both as they careen along a narrative trajectory designed to land smoothly on the cultural field to enthusiastic applause.

The following screen capture is one of the most widely reproduced images on the Internet from the film, and the scene is the basis for what became the most often circulated movie poster. It is worth studying in detail for several reasons: the majority of key scenes in the film take place in the classroom; any 'teacher movie' *per se* centers thematically on this pedagogical power nexus; Hundert's identity as teacher (and therefore any teacher-viewers whose eyes follow that of the camera lens) both develops itself and is revealed in the classroom scenes; and director Michael Hoffman has apparently lavished enough cinematographic detail on the classroom shots to warrant extensive filmic analysis of them.

StarPulse.Com, (1999)

In film, form embodies content. In both form *and* content, Hundert is the dominant in this shot. He is where our eyes first land. The sunlit and raised hands are a subsidiary contrast, appropriately secondary to, but dynamically linked with the dominant. The kinetic sweep of the hands to a raised position in the scene generates lines of force in the direction of the pedagogue. The students' attentions and gazes follow Hundert's, placing their focus decidedly *away* from the window (for the significance of this last, refer to points further on in this analysis). He, himself, does not reach back towards them, and seems almost to be modeling student behaviour *for* his charges--that is, he demonstrates an aerobic end-run around the Socratic Method, the partially physical offering up of oneself to a question (one signals willingness with an enthusiastically raised hand) before a teacher has a chance to call upon someone. Our gaze is the student

gaze, and the camera angle is slightly low, our head level with theirs and gazing up at the teacher. There is a kind of double-vision in scenes containing such shots: we see not only how the students literally respond to Hundert, how they enter into the requisite pantomimes, but also see Hundert's preferred vision of both himself and the student respondents that he desires to see reach out and up to him.

The shot is replete with both literal and figurative levels that narratively and ideologically show power relations through vertical imagery. Hundert is the teacher of the class, a moderately compensated profession that, in an elite prep school such as St. Benedict's, is responsible for preparing students for ascension into their upper class stations in life, niches that are their birthright. *If* Hundert, through his accomplished learning, can, as a member of the intelligentsia, occupy a rung on the social ladder above his charges, then the vertical power relations of his class make sense--he is symbolically and visually above them. But I suggest that this is an illusion that dominant culture propagates through films such as this; the teacher believes she occupies a privileged position when in fact (as Sedgewick's father decisively reminds Hundert) the power over students is a brief and necessary fiction only because the students are young--the wealthy and powerful senator will, himself, shape his son's character, and Hundert presumes too much when he assumes that his role as teacher extends beyond the facilitation of knowledge and skills acquisition to active agency in the formation of student identities. Hundert is allowed his powers by the culture at large only because his charges are children, and because he cannot affect change directly on the world. He believes that he can affect change from an isolated position by submitting his students to classical values. His failure is that his teaching identity is not sufficiently informed by an understanding of

the political status quo--knowledge of classical values on the part of his students cannot pre-empt the mechanism of the larger order of which his school is a part. Students like Sedgewick learn that lip service to the traditions of such a prep school carries more than sufficient cultural capital, when taken along with real wealth, to insure a rise to the highest levels of corporate and elected positions in the *polis.*

Since the classroom is such a key locus of student and teacher identity, and since it functions in pivotal ways inside the broader social order, it is important to understand precisely what the spatial and compositional aspects of this space are, inside the script and frames of *The Emperor's Club.*

In the shot above, the prevalence of geometric squares and rectangles is immediately apparent. This speaks to the framing function not only of the film itself but more thematically of the role of the teacher. Teachers can frame a discourse; they can bracket popular conceptions; they can isolate social phenomena, historical personages, and aspects of nature with whatever lesson points are in evidence, thereby affecting (or hoping to affect in any lasting sense) how students construe both their world and their knowledge about that world. Books on students' desks, the desks themselves, pictures on the wall, and the frames within frames that make up the complex of windows all compositionally underscore the framing function the teacher provides.

Such a compositional element, one would think, should function to affirm Hundert's power as a shaper of American's young citizens. But other elements of the set (the physicality of which is always an extension of characterization and theme) presents a powerful contradiction to what Hundert assumes is his power to direct the identity formations of others. The school's architecture is traditional, colonial American. Its rich

oaken hues and its umber, ochre, and sienna accents suggest the domain, rank, or dignity of a barony, of a private landholding--essentially a hereditary estate, replete even with light fixtures designed to look and hang like candles affixed to castle walls. But that is not Hundert's inheritance; it is that of his students and is a setting that anticipates both the students symbolic (and likely literal) future lodgings as well as the appearance later in the film of the adult Sedgewick's grand estate whereupon the grown students and Hundert (grandly helicoptered in) assemble for the rematch. Hundert is tutor, not Tudor; he is a teacher hired to bestow upon children of the dominant class learning that is the cultural patina, the gloss, that rests upon their economic functioning in the economy and that legitimates their occupation of their elite roles.

I suggest that the filmmakers were acting on a largely unconscious level when they composed these images. The script, the saccharine plot elements, and the treacly musical score are visual and aural aspects of the film intended to cheer the grand pedagogical function of a teacher who can shape young minds and change futures, even when he makes mistakes. Viewers are supposed to identify with the heroics--but also the human failings--of Hundert. But this film provides contrary--and therefore ideologically dissonant--visual evidence that dominant culture can police Hollywood narratives through the unconscious cinematographic choices of moviemakers. While Hundert's noble efforts are ostensibly lauded, the camera repeatedly presents viewers with visual reminders and justifications of the cultural limits he must respect. Cinematographers compose their images on three visual planes: the mid-, fore-, and background. In the above screen capture from the movie, Hundert occupies the middle ground as he occupies the middle class; the students are in the foreground as they will be in the forefront of the

social power structure, and the background represents a lower class dark that neither will ever reside in. Filmmakers also compose with an eye to the extent of detail within the frame, an amount determined by how close the camera gets to its subject. Curiously, the camera rarely gets close to Hundert--the subject we are *supposed* to identify with--choosing to present him almost exclusively in medium shots and thereby denying viewers the empathetic and emotional intimacy that the closeup affords (the viewer's eye almost always identifies with the camera lens). The teacher-viewer is not allowed to get too close to Hundert. Hundert remains at a distance, grandly framed in the trappings of barony, an idol in a niche--grand enough that the teaching profession is ennobled by the surrounding trappings of new world nobility, is awarded the *semblance* of power, but never so visually close to us as to allow us deep, empathetic entry into Hundert's character, a depth that might result in anger at the limitations placed upon him, *rather than in the socially sanctioned perspective, which is identification with a man who finally accepts his station in the order of things.*

I have remarked on the vertical imagery of the shot and its symbolic content. The horizontal or territorial dynamics of the above and other classroom shots also contain a spatial hierarchy of power. A given community's dominant entity is usually afforded the most space. Hundert's classroom is curiously crowded, his proximity to students close indeed. The density of visual textures in film (at least those films representing contemporary social spaces) are often analogues of the quality of life enjoyed by the characters. Generally, the rich and powerful enjoy more room in the physcial world of the narrative and in the film shot presented to us, as is convention most famously and extensively installed in the halls of Xanadu where Citizen Kane lives and walks. The

adult Sedgewick enjoys such roominess as well. Not so Hundert; he and his students are roughly equal, they to him because they are young, he to them because he is not of their class. Student bodies arrive, then eventually leave the cramped confines of this class, but it is a space in which Hundert must forever ever remain. Sedgewick most notably controls his entrances and exits, while Hundert cannot rise in the school hierarchy (gaining a larger office in doing so), and cannot, in the end, escape his classroom-bound fate. The position he occupies on the social grid denies him much social power, and any evidence of his effect on students--and therefore on (Hundert hopes) the world of the future--are never apparent to him. Thus, he stages masquerades of ancient power for solace, costuming his students in togas and speaking the words of emperors and philosophers. In his powerlessness, he is like Hamlet, king of infinite space inside the brown nutshell of his class. But the masquerade is finally not enough; nor is the unsubstantiated hope that his students will grow up to live their lives justly. He cannot bear to have students slip through his standards, his economy of hoped for but unconfirmed effects. At a secondary psychological level, he chafes at the perpetual student exodus from his sphere of influence. He seeks desperately to control the body of Sedgewick, in short to keep Sedgewick's body in the class by preventing the errant student and perennial dropout from leaving the program of study Hundert enmeshes him in. It is a futile attempt to arrest graduating time and the time of graduation, an aspect of temporality all teachers face when the students in the grade levels they teach are forever the same age while the teacher herself grows older.

**The Tutour of Tudors**

I draw the analogy to Hamlet because it is telling. Hamlet/Hundert is undone by a lack of meaning inside a castle-like power structure of a vertical nature, limited and disempowered by the figure of the usurping king/Sedgewick's father the senator. The disempowerment frustrates the possibility of love (Hamlet can love neither Gertrude nor Ophelia, and Hundert finds love only very late in life, after his best years have passed) and each seeks fevered solace in mental abstractions and discourses, as well as in arguments that are appeals to the past. A teacher-viewer might easily identify with Hundert's Hamlet-like state, since Hundert's cause appears just. But the failure of both Hamlet and Hundert is an inability to engage decisively with the political order that disenfranchises them, choosing instead to prick the conscience of the king (Hamlet through the play within the play and Hundert through his meeting with the senator). The result of their disenfranchisement is solitude. The sedentary teacher-viewer in the theatre, alone with her teacherly dilemmas in that psychological viewing moment, finds a ready analogue in Hundert. That is unfortunate, for Hamlet is undone, even while he functions as the protagonist in a heroic role. A teacher-viewer, in allowing a suture to be created between herself and the filmic situation and plight of Hundert, is essentially a suture to the heroic mode of the film (which carries a satisfaction) and to the trappings or the potential of social power through teaching. But Hundert does not exhibit or promote understanding of any effective way to ameliorate the effects of dominant culture power, so no suture is created between teacher-viewers and a way of teaching that instigates

direct political awareness and provides avenues of action. A teacher-viewer is presumably intended to find social significance for her profession when a small child disapproves of his daddy's admission of dishonesty and when Martin Blythe, despite being told that he was cheated by Hundert of a win in the contest, sends his child to Hundert for schooling nonetheless. The former narrative development is contrived and only speaks to what will likely be a short-lived conflict behind closed doors inside a family dynamic--it is not large-scale effect Hundert initiates on the cultural field. And as I argued above, Blythe risks nothing in sending his child to St. Benedict's; Hundert and the school will provide Blythe's son with the same cultural aegis that both Sedgewick and Blythe enjoy. *It is only a teacher and his very young students in the movie that care about a classroom bound trivia contest; people in general leave such concerns behind as they move out into the world and only ever revisit such moments mentally during school reunions or the viewing of teacher movies.* Hundert derives enormous and daily professional affirmation from his role in such rituals, as do many teachers, but most teacher films do not adequately interrogate the relationship between teaching and the facilitation of social action, opting instead to hope that second-order affect on their students might somehow lead to the development of socially conscious individuals (one wonders if one could not do more).

Teacher-viewers should very much read against the text of this film as it keeps a teacher firmly in her place. Hundert's belief in the formative role of teaching and in the lessons of the past come to naught, he is unable to mold character in a way contrary to character born of birthright and parental influence. He is unable to rise in the administration due to his lack of a broader understanding of how schools are funded in

the U.S. (donors such as Sedgewick's father must be appeased, and they won't be by challenges to dominion over their children), and he returns to his classroom defeated but ready to take up his work again with a renewed (but in my reading, a deeply ironic) sense of self-worth.

That is why, in the classroom scene above and in many similar shots throughout the film, Hundert is positioned in his classroom in uneasy relation to the windows and the bright, white light that shines in from them. He only once faces the windows (in an important scene discussed below), and while on one level the sunlight outside may only be intended to remind us of the outdoors that perpetually beckon to restless students, we must remember that the overall narrative of the film rarely ventures outside the school, confining our gaze to Hundert and his life as Hundert's own gaze is thus confined. The America beyond the windows is the power preserve of Sedgewick's father, the senator, and is a region that Hundert appears in uneasy visual relation to.

The film leaves Hundert's teacher identity--and any identities sutured to it--severely circumscribed but with a paradoxical sense of noble mission within the very bonds of that circumscription. This is, however, only a paradox from the perspective of a teacher seeking a meaningful professional identity in a film but finds there only an ideological dissonance; the film seeks to even out its inconsistencies through saccharine emotional appeals that, when resisted, reveal what could be called a strategy of containment on the part of the director. From the view of dominant culture hegemony, the picture is perfect. Teacherly consent for the powerlessness of such a pedagogue is firmly manufactured if that teacher fuels resistance (in both student and self) with learning. But she is finally unable to identify exactly what she should resist.

The visual design of film offers open and closed forms. Open forms present unassuming and informal compositions, such as a view of a park or a long shot of a busy street. Closed forms involve more stylized visual design wherein the elements of the shot are tightly controlled. Subjects within such shots are generally restricted not only within the visual density of the frame but within the symbolic restrictions of the objects in the shot that carry symbolic weight. In the following shot, we see Hundert once again hemmed in by physical elements that carry symbolic weights that bear on his situation:

StarPulse.Com, (1999)

In this scene, Sedgewick has just finished arguing unsuccessfully with the seated librarian. He wanted to take a book on reserve overnight, a loan that she has explained is against the rules. Hundert steps in and works hard to persuade her that he will be

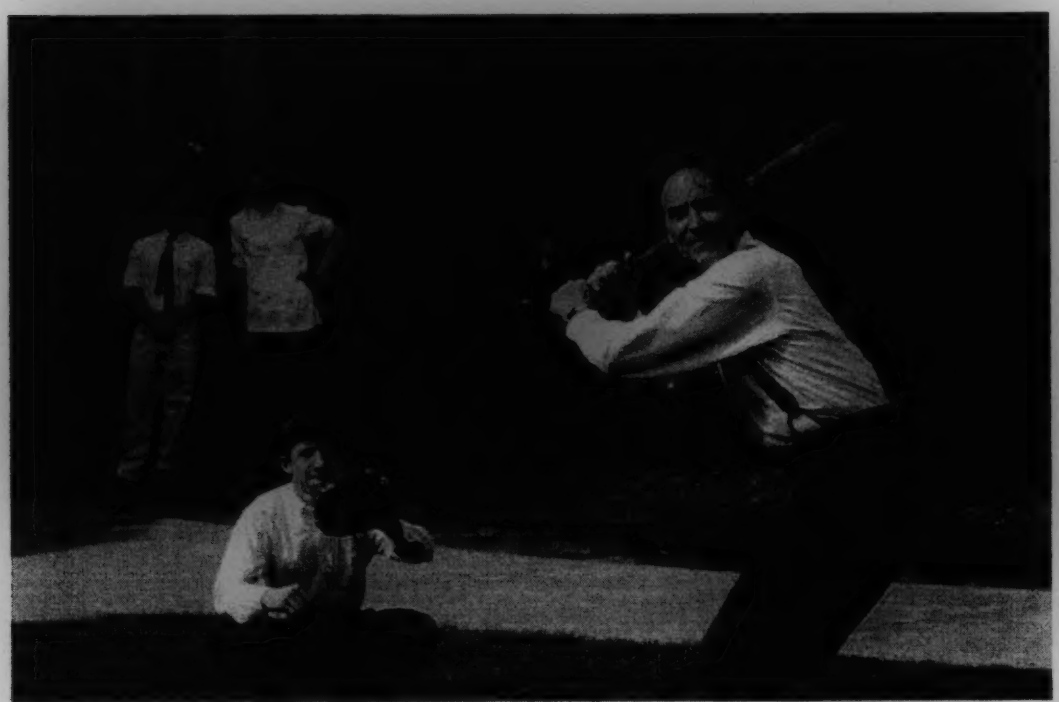
responsible for the loan. Hanging over Hundert's head (and therefore providing a visual limit) is a clock, an emblem of what we might term "teacher time," that strange purgatory wherein eternal verities are propounded in classrooms where teachers age and students don't. The lower portion of the American flag, an obvious symbol of dominant culture, appears so brightly lit with sun from the America outside (again, the preserve of the senator) that light from it appears to glance off Sedgewick's and Hundert's faces, underlining the influence of the culture and the father. Hundert is walled in on his left by the edge of the frame and on his right by sentinel bookcases reminding of his vocation. Behind him is merely the hall back to his classroom. Both the faceless librarian and Sedgewick are in attitudes of accusation, in opposition to the position of Hundert's left hand, a placement which seems to cry out, "Who, me?" The scene suggests in visual terms that Hundert is not powerful enough to break American rules large or small and get away with it (unlike Sedgewick and his father, who both may do so). The universe responds quickly to Hundert's bid to overstep his authority and to wrest Sedgewick's fate from the father's hands. In showing Sedgewick that he will make special allowances for him--in the case of the irregular book loan and later in the case of the elevated grade and the unreported cheating, Hundert not only loses his professional self-respect but treats Sedgewick to the same anti-egalitarian promotion of an undeserving nature that the senator gives his son. Hundert's transgressive moment gathers no power to himself or to his values; instead, it only aids a corrupt political/social order. The narrative of the film intends that we see this error, but that error itself is not where the story might frustrate rather than enable healthy teacher identity formation. Hundert's error is that he, ironically since he is a teacher, does not learn from his mistake. Instead of studying the workings

of the political order that circumscribe his pedagogical potential, he simply tries another route to gain the respect from his order he petulantly feels is his due. He tries, but fails, to rise up in the administration. No plot elements or otherwise later in the film redeem him from this lack of insight, but the tenor of the movie continues to herald him as laudable. Therefore, there is a dissonance that may only be resolved through ideological critique of the scenes.

Open forms appear less self-conscious in films, offer more visual breathing room to viewers, and therefore they are more often used (particularly in American film traditions) to depict persons, places or ideas in a positive light. In the westerns of John Ford, for example, the panoramic shots of the vast plains of the American frontier offer big skies and jutting irregular rock formations, suggesting wilderness, yes, but primarily possibility and potential. In scenes where Ford has characters (like those played by John Wayne) move indoors, the compositions become closed, constrained, and in the Ford tradition, are intended to represent the cramped and corrupt trappings of the European attitudes and laws being foisted on the frontier by Easterners. Germane to this discussion are the open forms so common in baseball movies such as *Field of Dreams.* In that film, wide open cornfields are conflated with wide open baseball fields and the cherished American values that blow breezily over both are positively affirmed by the visual design of the shots. There is some principles of order in those scenes--the corn grows in rows, the baseball diamond has its strict geometric design--but those who move along such lines are at ease with the ideological values the designs imply and are in no way constricted by them, unlike Hundert in all the indoor shots he appears in. As well, open forms (particularly those involving outdoor scenes) allow for some chance aspects to

work their way into the scene, such as wind in a character's hair or cloud formations in the sky above, further suggesting spontaneity and freedom for those who inhabit the scene.

In the screen capture below, we see Hundert after he has been coaxed by students to step off of the pathway that leads him directly to his classroom:



StarPulse.Com, (1999)

His classroom, as it is clearly evident in all shots of it throughout the film, is a region of dark tones and shadows that are only here and there shot through with light from the window. In the shot above, the closer a figure is to the school building, the more ensconced in shadow he becomes, and one has to wonder how a movie that in the end heralds its protagonist as noble would so consistently align both him and the values he espouses with darkness. (One could argue that it is because he is a flawed character who

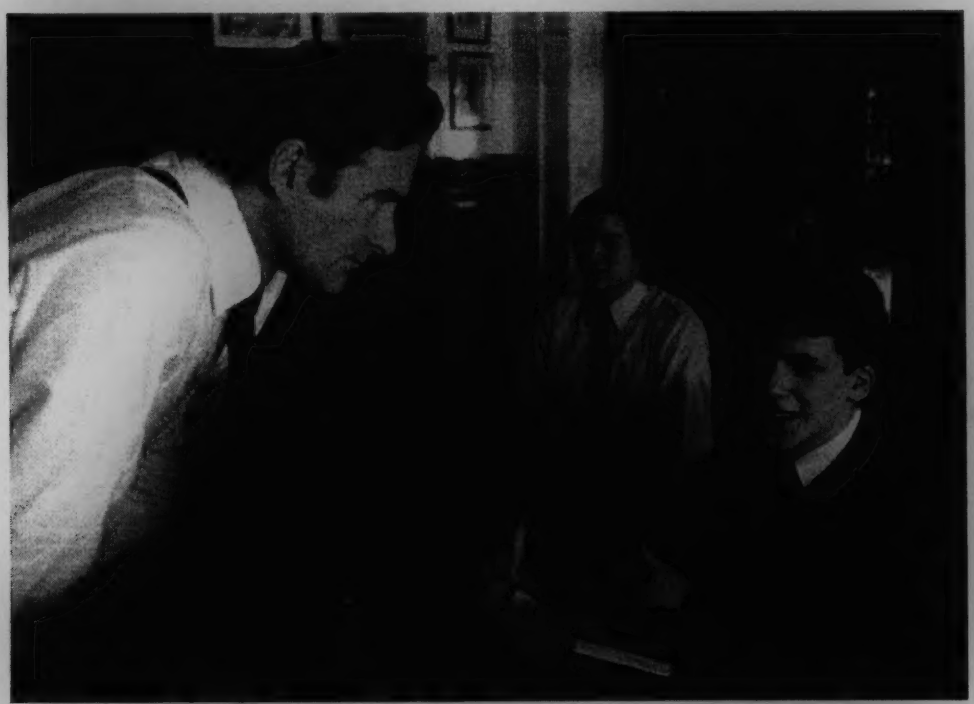
errs, and therefore that dark symbolically threatens, but such a reading does not account for the fact the narrative of the film overall is a minor pedagogical tragedy proffered to audiences as inspirationally triumphant.) The champion of Greek and Roman values tries his hand in this scene not at discus or javelin but at *his* empire's national past time, baseball. The near ancient cliché of the errant ball breaking a window, sending impish players scrambling, is here served up. The idea is to align our affections once more with Hundert, to humanize him, to comically ruffle his dignity and sense of right by having him run afoul of a minor property law (a moment of release from his ethical lectures) so that we are less likely to resist, along with Segewick, the ehtical virtues Hundert espouses. But such a reading fails to take into account the lighting of the classroom scenes which is always murky and low key, with high contrast accents only where the window shines its light inside, from a world that cannot live up to Hundert's ideals. Consideration of a shot that appears shortly after the window has been broken and after both teacher and students return hurriedly to class will make clear the ideological implications of the sequence overall:

StarPulse.Com, (1999)

The America outside his classroom has forbidden him entry into the game, into the grid, into American magic and power. It is notable that the two other times Hundert ventures out he is alien to the world he moves through: first, in his hapless encounter with the senator, and second, when he is flown to the adult Sedgewick's wealthy estate. The students, who function easily in the rituals and economies outside the window, bodily separate Hundert from that which they joyously look down upon, a life Hundert can only frown at and clutch his stomach queasily over. Both he and the students, save for Sedgewick, wear black and white, the colors of typographic print on pages, but Sedgewick, in lively and contrasting red, halts Hundert with a hand, preventing him from drawing too near the window. Hundert's values in no meaningful or apparent way ever

move beyond the space of his classroom, which, by virtue of his classical subject matter, is far reaching in content but severely limited in its effects.

There are important links between the dynamics of the film's *mise-en-scène*, teaching methods depicted, ideological message, and the historical setting of the story, as well as the film's release date. Consider the teaching dynamic that inheres in the following screen capture:



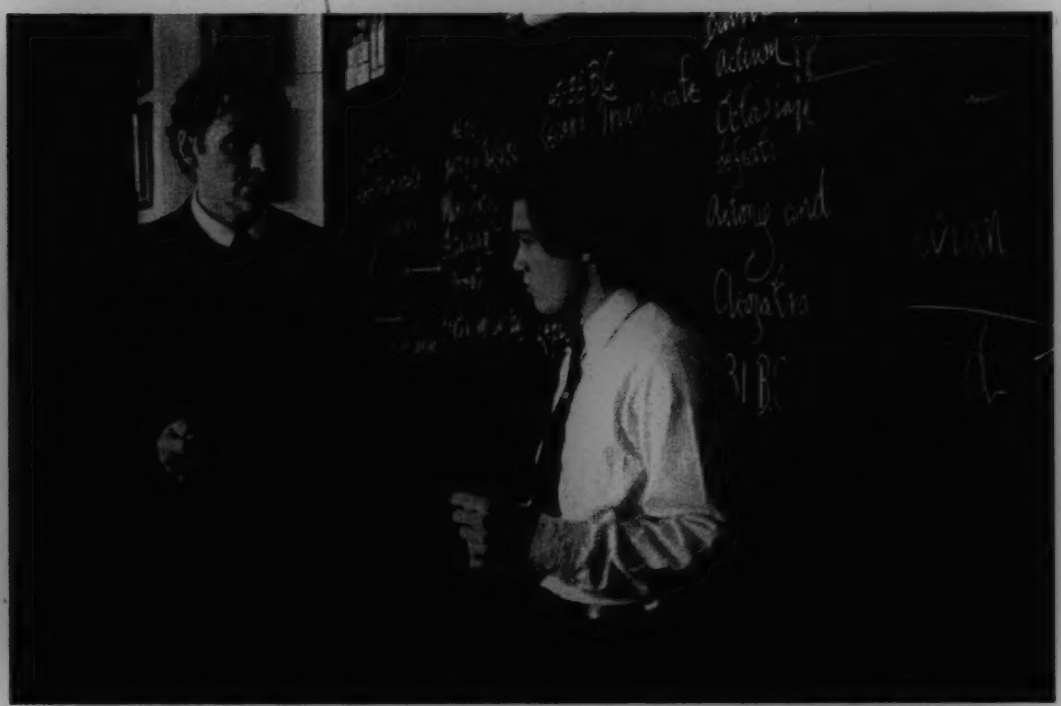
StarPulse.Com, (1999)

Hundert maintains his elevated position vertically, and in this shot directs an authoritarian and interrogatory gaze towards a student who wisely affects submissiveness by avoiding direct eye contact with Hundert. Both Sedgewick and another student in the background also direct their gazes elsewhere. The students sit in orderly rows and listen to unilateral

lectures or, at best, Socratic questioning. Their job is to listen, learn by rote, adhere to strict discipline, memorize and regurgitate facts, and, above all, accept the power dynamic *and its hierarchical implications* in the class. What do they finally learn from this dynamic? That power is hierarchical, that leadership has its privileges, that persons lower in the hierarchy cannot control social processes and may not offer input, and that it is the man at the front of the crowd who leads. Hundert's teaching methods are, by today's standards, retrograde, and he is blind to the disparity between the power inequities in the class and the egalitarian content of the lectures. The story is set in 1973, a year during which the Watergate trials were in full swing. So, one could argue that the film is simply faithful to its setting, presenting no radical teaching methods that are hallmarks of that generation of public school teachers, but not of their private school counterparts. And one could also say that thematically the implied message is straightforward enough: the Nixon administration is a symptom of a political culture that would do well to revisit the ethics discussed in the classical age. But the release date of the film was 2002, a point in time during which a particular observation by Baudrillard was, and is in widespread circulation at universities: namely, that we cannot claim that the political system is sound for having caught a Nixon, for it is a system that *produced* a Nixon. Power, Nixon clearly believed, had the prerogative to play by its own rules (when it wasn't preoccupied with having aphrodisiac effects, as his colleague Kissinger once observed it did) when the situation faced by those in power supposedly warranted such abuse. *The Emperor's Club*, from 2002 to the present, offers scenes constructed along the Nixon-era predicament *and* the conceptions of dominant culture power that characterized (and mostly still do) that era--but suggests that the only problem is that Hundert and

Sedgewick didn't try hard enough. The film errs by not recognizing problematic political structures and by reproducing those structures in its architecture.

In the screen capture below, the dynamics of the authoritarian gaze described above are still evident, but of main interest here is the Hundert's placement of Sedgewick at the front of the class after his student has misbehaved.



StarPulse.Com, (1999)

Hundert asks Sedgewick to write on the board certain answers that he knows his student has not learned. He humiliates Sedgewick by controlling the boy's body in space and time, by superimposing the student's lack-luster performance over the correct lesson written on the board, and by announcing, after Sedgewick's failure is staged for all to see, that stupidity is not a virtue. In Hundert's view, the failure to memorize rote responses

and to uncomplainingly function as a cog in the machine of Hundert's imposed power structure is stupidity. The color composition is telling in that Hundert stands outside the frame of the lesson, in the framer/controller's position, dressed in warm, brown tones, while Sedgewick's body in black and white is forcibly meant to almost mesh with the black and white of the historical text and page that he resists insertion of himself in. There is tremendous and unintended irony in this moment: it is Sedgewick and not Hundert who is refusing to let the state speak in the muscles of his tongue; it is Sedgewick who refuses to be functional in the traditional hierarchies of student power, hierarchies that reflect the corporate and non-democratic failings of the America outside; and it is Sedgewick who (years ahead of his time) insists on privileging the body during his years as a student, trying out rebellious and hedonistic philosophy instead of accepting the bloodless Apollonian rationality of his teacher.

By the close of the film, Hundert is the epitome of the non-reflexive teacher. He returns to classroom teaching where, on his first day back, maintains the placement of desks, lectures unilaterally once again, and compels students, as he always has, to read wall-bound inscriptions aloud prior to committing the lines to memory. The music swells, his countenance is wistful, he remains a teacher with uncertain effect on the world, and the teacher-viewer that the film hopes suture to the economy of its logic and narrative is supposed to feel a renewed sense of mission.

**Conclusion**

> The ending feels at odds with the rest of the film.
>
> ~Jeffrey Bruner, film reviewer, writing of *The Emperor's Club*

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well, then, I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes).
>
> ~Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

The reviewer above is ill at ease with what he perceives as a movie ending that does not follow from, or arise naturally out of what preceded. This reminds me of Žižek's point (quoted in my introduction) that an ending 'naturally' and 'organically' follows from preceding elements laid out so as to elicit this effect. His insight presented me with a problem: if I consciously structured my rhetoric in such a way that my conclusions seemed to flow 'naturally'--and therefore 'rightly'--out of ostensibly objective consideration of the world, then I would be ignoring the narrative illusion that the study of film reveals, namely, that a structured chain of elements creates a sense of inevitability in a reader or viewer that is assumed to be *a quality of the world rather than an illusion created by the narrative.* Also of concern, as I move towards concluding remarks here, are the limits of analysis when it comes to speculation on the identity formation of teachers in response to film. Such formations, as well as those behind any type of human analysis, are radically subjective and notoriously elusive of both qualitative and quantitative efforts to apprehend or at least trace them. The most prudent route appears to engage in rigorous and informed speculation, while offering no essentialist claims or

closed readings. If I am to assume, as I do, that non-passive and critically informed readings of teacher movies can create greater agency on the part of teachers as regards the identifications they make, then I must assume that the process is very much open-ended.

To conclude as honestly as possible then, I want to attest to just how open-ended my reading of the film is by refusing to rhetorically finalize the above analysis and to instead attest to a quite opposite and emotionally charged personal response to the film than I have not owned up to thus far, nor allowed a function in my analysis.

What is going on in the head of a teacher-viewer who clearly perceives the march of film cliches--and who understands the machinery of narrative manipulation, worries over the commercialism of production practices and their effects on story lines, scowls as dominant culture peers from the folds of the film seeking to reproduce itself in viewers, puzzles over contradictions, reads connections between form and content, and rails at colleagues who seem to swallow anything whole that a screen offers up--but who nonetheless finds herself teary eyed at the end of *The Emperor's Club* every time she sees it?

For that is indeed my response each time I watch the film. Perhaps suturing is not a process that is ever complete, and therefore I am able to worry over political aspects of the story while nonetheless being able to walk a mile in someone's shoes that fit me very well. Perhaps it is because the profession of teaching, caught up as it is in the usual workplaces stresses but in addition the tensions of young charges and their caring parents, is itself an emotionally charged profession. Perhaps my response follows from an awareness that since the movie gained wide release that I am participating in a collective

experience that celebrates my profession. Is there satisfaction in the fact that how ever it is that teachers may function or be treated in my society that at least we are worth making films about?

Or is it more complex than that? In being able to speculate that others have deeply empathized or identified with Hundert, including mostly non-teachers, then do I at some level believe that viewer empathy is reaching out to *me?* Teary yet joyous moments usually result from deeply needed recognition between selves, from sudden recognition of needs and wants. Does the film recognize me? Am I responding to it as an other? Or do I cry over having received affirmation from its writers or from others who I imagine assent to its message?

Perhaps the psychoanalytic need, my desire for the other and for her need of me, is what is paramount or universal (I use these terms playfully, for what the words mean but also to recall to mind the names of two large studios) and that intense psychological satisfaction comes from the fact that film gives the illusion of bodies attendant upon us, as proximate--our needs find bodies that express these needs on screen, and as at least one critic has noticed "embodiment is integral to self-formation" (Zembylas, 2002, p. 110).

And maybe that is film's great power, that it can take us into the dark of the theatre or onto the comfort of the sofa at home and there provide us with our earlier infant need to be affirmed and loved. There is emotion, yes, in the sometimes strident and angry tone of my politicized film analysis, but that satisfies only one part of the constellation of my identity. But how can that compare to feelings brought on by a smiling face--by that physical constellation of features that is the approving parent who

first recognizes our significance? And Hundert's face smiles in pleasure and perceived meaning at the close, while musical phrases and rhythms I have long associated with other emotional film moments draw on my accumulated emotional memories. It is a visual delight that in part appeals to the child in me, in part to the teacher I've become, for when it comes to this movie, I have for whatever reasons called out "Again", so that it can play before my eyes once more, critically or otherwise.

Having included the above anti-conclusion, I would nonetheless like to offer a summary of my main conclusions in a more traditional fashion:

- *The Emperor's Club* plays upon the teacher's desire for self-actuation in relation to the student other; it installs the self-sacrificial script from which there is no escape except into a pedagogical abuse of power; it provides an object lesson as regards the consequences of that abuse; and it leaves the teacher figure alone with his sense of failure and a new respect for his own limits in a society that knows very well what it expects of its teachers--and what it will not allow.
- Hollywood narratives such as *The Emperor's Club*--born of the studio system and bent on a commercial success dependent upon a film's ability to resonate with dominant cultural norms--contain an ideological dissonance that, after suturing takes place, installs limits on teacher identity formation. Hallmarks of these movies, such as the classical Hollywood paradigm, the realist style, a narrative that functions in the heroic mode, and cinematographic elements that support all of the above function to set up diverse and dubious conceptions: namely, that classroom learning is separate from the "real" world (of markets and of financial imperatives), that the teacher must be self-sacrificial, that an ecstatic sense of

one's role in a self-sacrificial profession is required, that one is entirely captain of one's bounded, coherent identity, and that the ideal teacher should never aspire to challenge, subsume, or trump other formative, adult roles in students' lives, not without a social cost for both teacher and students.

- The inherent contradictions in such films reveal their primary role--they are narratives that police teacherly identity. Through an understanding of desire, identity formation, the cinema, and the interaction between the three, this role can be revealed in critique and can be resisted to delimit and enhance teacher subjectivities.
- The sometimes solitary nature of the discipline, the importance of the body in passive viewing, the codes governing bodily interaction with students, and visual culture's power to link representation of bodies in space and time to the meanings we attach to those bodies as they function inside professions are all important operative notions in this effort to create a stronger sense of the relation between visual culture and visually affected teaching culture.
- While the ambiguity of film interpretation and the necessarily speculative nature of triangulating upon sutures that may take place in individual teacher minds is acknowledged here, a grounded reading of the film is nonetheless emplaced and the effects of the film asserted--a necessary attempt to render legible social scripts, codes, and effects of power.
- This analytical effort aspires in only very small part to answer Christian Metz, who, J. Dudley Andrew explains, asks us to see "beyond the petty cinema of the past and toward the vast domain of untried and repressed significations. With this

freedom comes a vast responsibility. Signification doesn't simply exist; it must be created....The camera captures nothing" (Andrew, 1976, p. 239).

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